

THE DANGEROUS ISLANDS

Julia Probyn—an old friend to many readers—is sailing off the West coast of Scotland. On the desolate island of Erinish Beg, she and her cousin are startled to see a sky-blue pole rise up out of the ground at their feet. Military Intelligence sends Colonel Jamieson to investigate this find. The action moves from the Erinishes to a tweed-shop in Tobermory, to an archaeological dig on Lewis, to an island off County Mayo, and finally to a dramatic end in the Scillies. The mystery of the sky-blue pole is solved soon enough; but there is much journeying, heart-searching and danger for Julia before the whole system of espionage is laid bare. During these events Julia, more and more attracted to Colonel Jamieson, finds in him the man she will marry.

By the Same Author

PORTRAIT OF MY MOTHER
PEKING PICNIC
THE GINGER GRIFFIN
ILLYRIAN SPRING
THE SONG IN THE HOUSE
ENCHANTER'S NIGHTSHADE
FOUR-PART SETTING
FRONTIER PASSAGE
SINGING WATERS
AND THEN YOU CAME
THE DARK MOMENT
A PLACE TO STAND
THE LIGHTHEARTED QUEST
THE PORTUGUESE ESCAPE
THE NUMBERED ACCOUNT
THE TIGHTENING STRING

THE DANGEROUS ISLANDS

by
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Chapter I

THE *Mary Hathaway* was reaching northwards up the west coast of Scotland under a stiff westerly breeze; a breeze so stiff that Philip Reeder, her owner and Skipper, had just decreed that a reef should be taken in her big mainsail, of over a thousand superficial feet. Thank goodness for the mechanical reefing gear, his wife Edina thought; she had been sailing about the West Highlands all her life and remembered, even as a child, the painful and exhausting business of putting a yacht into the wind and then with one's bare hands clawing and scratching down the stiff canvas, damp with spray, and tying in the reefs. Nowadays, apart from loosening some ropes, an iron handle on the mainmast did the job for one, all but tying a few cords when the sail had been lowered.

'I think she'll do like that,' Philip Reeder said. He was standing in the cockpit, steering, and as he spoke made the slightest adjustment of the wheel to meet the onslaught of a particularly large wave coming in from the Atlantic—the big graceful yacht barely swerved before resuming her northward course. The crew, consisting of his wife, her cousin Julia Probyn, and her brother Colin Monro, scrambled back from their cord-tying along the great boom, and perched themselves on the steeply-slanting deck, their legs dangling into the cockpit to give them purchase.

'Yes—I think she's fine so,' Edina said. 'I don't think we need take in the foresail. We've got plenty of clearance, and we want to get up in good time. Goodness, how lovely Ben Mor is!—do look at that great curving ridge.'

'Which is Ben Mor?' The question came from the only passenger, Captain Benson, who had remained sitting quietly in the cockpit while his hostess and her relations shuttled precariously about the deck dealing with the reefing operations.

'That great blue cone—to the right, beyond Iona.'

'Oh, can one see Iona?'

'Yes,' Philip Reeder replied—'I'm steering on the Cathedral. Have the glasses'—he handed his guest an outsize pair of Zeiss

binoculars. 'This is one of the few ocean spaces where one can steer on a Cathedral,' he added amusedly.

Captain Benson studied the squat tower of the Cathedral rather perfunctorily, and then used the field-glasses to sweep the sea for bird-life. He was an impassioned ornithologist, and this expedition had been arranged partly to take him to some rather remote islands where he could observe Manx Shearwaters and their breeding-places; but he could never keep his eyes off birds. However, save for a few guillemots, who plunged their neat black-and-white bodies smartly into the water as the yacht came near, there was little to be seen but a few questing gannets, patrolling the sky overhead. It was a brilliant day—sea, sky, and the hills to their right were all blue in different tones: the land as soft as a Japanese colour-print, the sky like one vast forget-me-not; but the water had a jewel-like brilliance, flecked with the sharp white crests of wave-tops breaking under the ever-stiffening breeze.

'Colin, I think we'd better have the foresail off her,' Philip Reeder said presently, as the wind increased in strength, and the yacht heeled over more and more.

'Oh God!' Colin groaned. 'I hoped we were going to get some lunch. Well put her up.' He, Edina, and Julia all scrambled to their feet as the yacht was put straight into the wind; the big mainsail flapped horribly, with a loud menacing sound, as they loosened sheets, pulled down the foresail, and lashed it in a tight bundle.

'Philip's quite dotty about this boat,' Colin muttered to his sister, as they knotted the last linen ties.

'Yes, she's his new toy,' Philip's wife said cheerfully.

In fact the yacht, though a new toy for Philip Reeder, was quite an old boat, built for the Fastnet Race many years before, and was old-fashioned in many respects, such as being gaff-rigged and having a bowsprit; he had bought her, cheap, that spring, because she was more spacious and comfortable than his previous boat, and being built for ocean racing had a considerable turn of speed—as well as the inconveniently deep draught of nearly nine feet. He had however given her a new mainsail. Only yachtsmen know the almost insane, maternal feeling which men have for such possessions. Her original name had been *The Mary*; but Philip Reeder had become so devoted to Mary Hathaway, his mother-in-law's old friend and Julia Probyn's god-

mother, that he had taken the unusual step of changing the boat's name in Lloyd's Register to the *Mary Hathaway*.

Presently they had lunch down in the saloon; Edina was the only person allowed to steer off a lee shore, and Julia brought in the food from the galley in the fo'c'sle: venison pasties from the home deep-freeze, salad, and strawberries-and-cream, washed down by 'Heavy Export Ale', the strongest beer in the British Isles.

'What a meal!' Captain Benson exclaimed, wiping his small military tooth-brush moustache which, like what remained of his hair, was gingery turning grey.

'Ah, this is about the last of the Glentoran food—from now on you won't do so well,' his host said cheerfully. 'We shall have to live off the country, or out of tins.'

Over the coffee, produced by Julia from the Calor-gas stove in the galley, Captain Benson, a little flown by the strong ale, expatiated on the subject of Shearwaters, and their amazing capacity for finding their way back from enormous distances to their breeding-grounds.

'Pigeons are nothing to them,' he said, puffing at his cigarette. 'Shearwaters, ringed and dated, have been taken as far as Newfoundland to be released, and within a fortnight they've come back to the west coast of Scotland, and been netted and checked. They must have something like radar equipment in those little heads of theirs.'

'Electronics, I suppose,' said Julia airily; she too was smoking, but turned her big eyes onto the little man in her usual casual-melting manner.

'Do you know about electronics?' he asked, surprised; Julia's beauty, and the way in which even her yachting clothes conveyed a hint of fashion had already produced an impression. If a woman's figure is really good, nothing displays it to greater advantage than the clinging closeness of a high-necked seaman's jersey over trousers—but Julia was far too good at dress to wear stiff hideous jeans; her trousers were of the same dark blue as her jersey, but knitted, full, and loose, the bottoms tucked into white socks above spotless white canvas shoes.

'Goodness no!' she replied to his question—'only the name. But isn't that how they track Sputniks and things?—or do I mean radar?'

'Julia dear, how seldom you know what you mean!' Philip said, smiling at her as he got up. 'Benson, don't move—have some more coffee. I'm going to relieve my wife, and let her eat.' He climbed nimbly up the companion-ladder, and a moment later Edina came down, and began her meal.

Captain Benson was still obsessed with the subject of birds.

'Is there any chance of finding the Red-necked Phalarope on the Erinish Islands?' he asked earnestly.

'No, I don't think so. They used to nest on Benbecula, but with all this military occupation, and making roads and loosing off rockets, I should think they've been driven away, probably.'

Colin, who was washing up in the galley, poked his dark head and pale face in through the low doorway.

'The Song of the Naturalist in the Highlands,' he said, and intoned:

'At last, at last, I have a hope
To see the Red-necked Phalarope.
At last, at last I hope to see
The red-red-necked Phalaropee.'

He retired to his small sink; Julia burred her low laugh; Captain Benson smiled a rather chilly smile.

'Very amusing,' he said politely. 'Could we go to Benbecula?'

'I don't know what the restrictions are now,' Edina said, forking salad into her mouth. 'Everything is made so difficult with these military goings-on. How lovely it was when there was no cold war, and all this coast was utterly free.'

'Well the poor little Erinishes will be free anyhow, won't they?' Julia said. 'No installations there, thank God—only sheep and Shearwaters.'

'Sheep?' Captain Benson asked.

'Oh yes,' Edina told him. 'They're grassy islands, and the sheep are taken there in boats in the spring to eat the grass, and taken off again in the autumn.'

'Who looks after the sheep?'

'No one—they don't take lambing ewes there, only hoggetts. There's not a soul living on them.'

Some hours later Philip Reeder steered the yacht carefully into the space between the two islands, Erinish Mor and Erinish Beg, the Great and the Little. The depth here was nine fathoms; just outside the entrance it was thirteen fathoms, and the little

anchorage was completely protected from the west, the prevailing wind. Although the *Mary Hathaway* had an auxiliary engine Philip Reeder was a purist about going into an anchorage under sail, so there was the usual performance of getting down the main-sail and going in on the jib, and then letting go the anchor with a great rattling of chains; finally, when the skipper was satisfied that 'she was holding', his long-suffering crew took down and lashed the jib, and then lowered the dinghy over the side, and put the hooked steps into position to get into it.

'Tea first, or after?' Philip asked, when all this was done.

'Oh for pity's sake let's have some tea!' Julia exclaimed. 'We toil, Philip; you merely steer, which isn't work at all; it's just fun.'

Philip laughed, and agreed to tea before they went ashore. 'Anyhow the Manx Shearwater is a crepuscular bird, isn't it?' he said to Captain Benson.

'Ah, um, yes—well yes and no. At its breeding-places it is really nocturnal, but it ranges far and wide over the sea by day, finding food. What I am hoping to see are those curious assemblies on the water before sunset, when the birds rest and preen and wash and—well, fly about a little—before they go to their nesting-burrows.'

'A sort of get-together?' Colin asked.

'It could be that. Anyhow they do it.'

'Why burrows?' Julia put in. 'Do they nest underground?'

'Oh yes—use old rabbit-burrows when they can, of course; that's why they like these turfy islands.'

'What is their Latin name?' Edina enquired. Her husband laughed.

'*Puffinus puffinus puffinus*. Better me that for a silly name, if you can.'

'I can!' Julia said instantly. 'The Harlequin Duck is called *Histrionicus histrionicus histrionicus*!'

'You got that from Peter Fleming,' her host said cheerfully. 'He made good use of it—the perfect excuse for not giving the Latin names of Brazilian birds.' Fond as he was of Julia, he didn't particularly want her to upset Captain Benson's emotions, which he felt she was all too likely to do.

After tea the party split up. Philip Reeder said that the Shearwaters bred principally on Erinish Mor, so Colin rowed him and

Benson over there in the dinghy; then he came back and picked up Julia to take her to Erinish Beg—Edina said that she would stay on board, to get the supper and do some washing. Philip had a powerful whistle, which he undertook to blow when he and his companion wanted to be fetched. *z*.

The Erinish Islands are not particularly high; rocky bluffs rise above their boulder-strewn shores to rather flat tops, covered with short yellowish turf, on which the sheep get their summer grazing. On both islands low stone-built walls mark the remains of the forts which Oliver Cromwell built, so it is alleged, to resist French or Spanish invasions; now they are only used by the sheep, huddled under them to shelter from the fierce rain-storms which blow in from the Atlantic. Colin and Julia climbed up by an easy gully above the anchorage, and proceeded to inspect Cromwell's forts without much interest—they were full of droppings, and smelt strong and rank.

'Can't think what he thought he was defending, out here,' Colin said. 'The Highlands were worth even less, economically, then than they are today, I imagine.'

'Just the western approaches in general, perhaps,' Julia said carelessly. They left the forts and wandered on to the westernmost point of the island, and sat down at the very verge of the bluff, where it fell away to the beach below them. 'Oh look,' the girl said—'one can just see all the Outer Islands, hull down; how lovely.' Far away, where she pointed, blue mountains rose out of blue water on the horizon, where the blue of the sky turned pale.

'Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides'

Colin quoted. *~*

'What broke the silence?' Julia asked.

'The cuckoo-bird's sweet silly voice.'

'*Are* there cuckoos in the Outer Islands?'

Colin never answered her question, because at that moment Julia said 'Oh look!' again, but in an altogether different tone; and again pointed, this time to something quite close by, which absorbed their attention for the next hour or more—absorbed it so completely that Philip Reeder had blown his whistle four or five times before the sound penetrated their consciousness.

'There's the whistle,' Julia said, getting up from where she knelt on the ground. *..*

'Damn!' Colin exclaimed. 'Yes, we shall have to go. Just help me to put these turfs back, will you?' When she had done so he stamped several sods of turf, on a space roughly eighteen inches square, back into place, and brushed away a few pebbles and some loose soil from the surrounding grass.

'That'll do—come on,' he said, and began to stride back across the small island to the anchorage. 'Not a *word* about this to anyone,' he said to his cousin—'least of all to that bird-fancier type. After all, what do we know about him?'

'I thought he was a friend of the Menteiths.'

'Not a friend; just someone they know vaguely who said he wanted to look at Shearwaters—so, as Philip had planned a cruise anyhow, they asked him to bring Benson up here. But he may have wanted to come to the Erinish Islands to inspect precisely what we have found.'

'Whatever that is,' Julia said coolly. 'Or not. Anyhow mum's the word.'

They slithered down the gully and un-moored the dinghy, which Colin rowed rapidly across to Erinish Mor; Philip Reeder, who had been whistling exasperatedly, stopped when he saw the little boat crossing the narrow channel.

'I *must* get ashore tomorrow somehow, Great Grey Seals or no Great Grey Seals—somewhere where there's a telephone,' Colin said anxiously to his cousin. 'Can you think up anything? It would look better if you suggested it.'

'Don't row so fast; let me think—Philip can wait a few more minutes for his supper.'

Colin obediently slackened his short brief strokes, the 'waterman's jerk', so useful in dinghies.

'Well?'

'Edina could arrange it better than me. But there's a heronry on Ullin, and she knows the MacIans; so do I, a bit. They have a telephone, I'm positive. I could say I wanted to see them, and persuade Captain Benson that he really must hear the young herons chackling in their nests—it's the weirdest sound. That do?'

'You must make it do—I'm sure you can—and better you than Edina, as she doesn't know about this.'

'Well, I'll try.'

'We thought you'd both suddenly turned stone deaf,' Philip

Reeder said, as the dinghy grounded on the beach of Erinish Mor. 'Colin, get up into the bow; I'll row.'

'You're always so impatient, Philip,' Julia said, moving to one side of the small seat in the stern to make room for Captain Benson beside her. 'You can't be in the least hungry; we only had lunch about three. Captain Benson, did you see the Shearwaters?'

'Yes indeed; most splendidly.' He described the numbers of birds on the water, splashing and preening—'You know they spend nearly half their waking life preening their feathers.'

'Like cats licking themselves,' Julia observed.

'Precisely. Though I don't know that cats are under such an imperative necessity to keep their fur clean as Shearwaters are to keep their feathers water-proof.'

'Or else they'd get swamped and drowned, you mean?'

'More or less,' the little man said, beaming at this cool beautiful creature, who seemed to take such an intelligent interest in his pet subject. Julia beamed on him in return, with her great doves' eyes; by the time they were half way through Edina's excellent supper, in the snug little saloon on the *Mary Hathaway*, it was clear that Captain Benson was in full process of subjugation. Then Julia struck her blow for Colin.

'Captain Benson, there's an enormous heronry on Ullin—and I believe there are red-necked phalaropes there too. Philip, couldn't we put in there? I'd love Captain Benson to hear the extraordinary noise the young herons make in their nests—like shingle rattling on a beach. Have you ever heard it?' she asked the Captain.

It so happened that he never had, and expressed a strong desire to do so.

'We thought of going round Heskeir tomorrow to look for the Great Grey Seals,' Philip said, rather repressively. 'The tides will be just right, and the young should be out on the rocks, with their curly white fleeces. They really are worth seeing.'

'Philip, the tides don't change all that much in twenty-four hours,' Julia protested—'and we're so *near* Ullin. If you go out to Heskeir you'll go on and on, and never come back! I do want Captain Benson to hear the young herons.'

To Julia's surprise, Edina spoke up in support of her suggestion. She would like to see her friends the MacIans, since they were so

near; they could get milk and cream and bread, and probably chickens, or even ducks—at the worst a leg of mutton. ‘Someone has to look after the commissariat,’ Philip’s wife said, looking rather firmly at her husband. ‘And you’ve never seen all those carved tombstones in the Abbey at Inch-Ian, have you? They’re very remarkable.’ Philip never had, and didn’t much mind if he never did; but he realised that his wife wanted to put in at Ullin, and gave way. Anyhow it was a superbly safe and sheltered anchorage.

Julia’s surprise at Edina’s intervention was largely due to the fact that she knew, positively, that Colin had had no opportunity of speaking alone to his sister since they came on board. Colin was a great one, she knew from past experience, for binding other people to silence, and then saying whatever he thought appropriate himself—but this time she had been with Edina, dishing up the supper, from the moment they climbed the hanging steps onto the deck. She had combed out her rather long lion-coloured hair and powdered her face in the galley, without going through to the cabin which she and Edina shared—Philip, like a conscientious skipper, slept in an extremely public bunk at the foot of the companion-ladder, opposite the lavatory-cum-washroom; the Captain and Colin on the squashy and most comfortable seats in the saloon.

What she had failed to reckon with was Edina’s intense perception where her brother was concerned. Mrs. Reeder had noticed his abstracted manner at supper, and seen him jerking his double-jointed thumb in and out, always a symptom of nerves or worry; above all she observed the extreme concentration with which he looked on while Julia put forward the proposal to land on Ullin—when Philip opposed this Colin’s thumb had jerked furiously and audibly. Obviously for some reason the beloved brother wanted desperately to get ashore, presumably on the island with the heronry; so she put her oar in, and gained her point—or rather his.

When supper and coffee were over, and the men were washing up—this was part of the routine on the yacht—the two young women went on deck. It was a calm evening; the steady breeze which had carried them racing up past Iona had died away, and only faint movements of air brought the smell of seaweed from the boulder-strewn shores, and occasional puffs of the strong

odour of sheep—a broad red band on the northern horizon indicated the brief absence of the sun. They smoked, in silence, for a time.

‘What’s fussing Colin?’ Edina asked presently. ‘Why must he land on Ullin? I’m sure you were organising that for him.’

‘Why do you think so?’

‘Oh, he looked as if he had seen a ghost! And he was in a frenzy about getting it arranged.’

‘Well you played up splendidly,’ Julia said. She paused, thinking what best to say. ‘I gather he remembered something he’d forgotten—anyhow he simply must get ashore and telephone tomorrow. The MacIans have got a telephone, haven’t they?’

‘Yes—in the drawing-room! He’d much better go ashore to the Post Office at Inch-Ian, if it’s some official performance—though I expect half Mull will listen in to that!’ She paused, and lit another cigarette. ‘You can’t tell me what the trouble is?’ she asked.

‘No, I can’t Edina. But he certainly won’t want to pour it all out from the MacIans’ drawing-room, in front of everybody. You fix it that he gets put ashore at Inch-Ian, will you? On the Q.T.’

On the following morning Edina did precisely that. Colin, she stated firmly, wanted to look at the tomb-slabs on Inch-Ian; Julia and he would row ashore in the dinghy, while the rest of them tied up the *Mary Hathaway* at the pier on Ullin and made contact with the MacIans. ‘I’ll do some purchasing, and Captain Benson can go and listen to the herons, and look for phalaropes. I daresay we shall get a free lunch; the Mac-I.s are madly hospitable, and anyhow they never see anyone—guests are a gift.’

Ullin’s Isle is long, low, and grey-green; opposite, across the narrow sound, the landward shore is the same. Julia rowed Colin to a point which the chart showed as nearest the village; ignoring the Abbey and its tomb-slabs they made straight for the Post Office. This contained a far from sound-proof telephone-booth; Colin entered it, and asked for a London number.

‘Is it London you’re wanting?’ said the post mistress, coming out from behind the counter where she dispensed stamps, Postal Orders, Old-Age Pensions, and Heinz’s products with impartiality.

‘Yes please.’

'Ah, well I'd better speak to Salen myself.' She did what is known in the West Highlands as 'speaking over the line'.

'Is that Salen? Good morning, Mary Anne. How's your Mother? Oh, that's grand. I'm so glad. Give her my love. Listen, Mary Anne, could you get me Oban? I have a gentleman here that wants to speak with London.'

After more of these warm-hearted exchanges—one of the Oban operators was a niece of the Inch-Ian post mistress, so further family enquiries—Colin was at last put through to his London number. Julia could hear every word; so of course could the post mistress, and some antique creatures who had come in to draw their pensions—though one at least of these was deaf.

Colin first checked on the number; then he asked for Major Torrens, but by a letter and three numbers—Julia didn't realise who he wanted till Colin said—

'Hugh? Colin here. Look, we've seen something rather extraordinary. I think it should be checked—at once . . . Oh, me and Julia . . . From an *intensely* public call-office at a place called Inch-Ian.' . . . Colin gave his still-youthful giggle. 'All right—I'll wait while you look it out.' There was a surprisingly short pause, during which Julia slid into the box behind her cousin, and muttered—'Hold the thing a little away from your ear, and I can listen too.' Presently she heard Hugh Torrens' so familiar voice say—'I've got it. There?'

'No; on an island some distance out to sea—we're sailing.'

'Oh, on the rich ex-merchant seaman's yacht! Listen, Colin, you must try to give me some idea of what you've found, or I shan't know who could check, satisfactorily.'

Colin gulped. 'Well, someone in Brown's department, I should think,' he said.

'You really mean this?'

'Like hell I do! Do you remember that nonsense we found last year on the Berleugas?'

'Oh that.'

This name evidently produced an effect on the Major; even in the Secret Service a spark is occasionally kindled.

'Oh, if that's the line of country, Jimmie is the man to come up. I'll see if he's in—hold on.'

There was another pause—this time more prolonged.

'Where is he to come to?' Julia muttered to her cousin over

his shoulder. 'Heskeir is only a lighthouse, with Grey Seals!—he can't get there, and that's where Philip wants to go next.' Then they both heard Major Torrens' voice again.

'He's out. Where can I get you?'

'Oh God, how can you get a yacht?' Colin exclaimed exasperatedly. 'I told you we're sailing.' Julia leaned out of the box.

'Mrs. Macsporrán, what is Sir Ian MacIan's number?'

'Inch-Ian 2, Miss.'

She leaned into the box again, and snatched the receiver from Colin's hand.

'Hugh, till 2.30, or perhaps 3, you can almost certainly get Colin at Inch-Ian 2.'

'Oh Julia, is that you? My dear, how are you?'

'Brilliantly well.'

'On the job, as usual?'

'Yes. But I agree with Colin—someone must come up to see these dotty doings.'

'You've seen them?'

'Oh God, yes! Too peculiar for words. Look, if Colonel J. rings up the number I've given you, warn him that it's in the drawing-room, with a large house-party sitting round listening!'

'It seems to me that the one point is to settle where he is to meet the yacht,' Major Torrens said, very sensibly.

'How right! But it's not *my* yacht,' Julia said. She paused. 'Listen, Hugh—I think this may turn out nasty; I don't know why I think so, I just have a hunch. What I suggest is a pub in Tobermory, tomorrow evening; everyone goes to pubs, and if he catches a train to Oban tonight, he can make it easily. We'll find out about the best pub, ready for when he rings. Do you want to talk to C. again?'

'I don't think so. Goodbye, my dear.'

Colin, like Julia, had heard both sides of this conversation.

'How you do like taking things into your own hands, don't you?' he said rather irritably, when she had put down the receiver.

'Only to be useful. Come on—let's pay, and row over. You'll have to ring Hugh up again if the Mac-I's don't ask us to lunch.'

The call to London cost twenty-seven shillings—startling and delighting the postmistress. Very few small West Highland post offices can often record a call for such a sum. As they rowed across the sound

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'You'll never get Philip to go into Tobermory,' Colin said gloomily.

'If I can't, Edina will, if you ask her,' Julia replied. 'Don't be so defeatist, Colin darling.'

The MacIans had invited the whole party to lunch in their large, vaguely Georgian house, with lofty rooms and high windows. Sir Ian was a good deal older than his wife, and rather deaf—one less to overhear, Julia thought; his wife was tall and thickly-built, with pretty curly grey hair and a square, gay, amusing face. She would be the useful one, Julia decided, and over the pre-lunch drinks she concentrated on her hostess—the only other guest was an ancient lady with a hearing-aid, staying in the house. Really Captain Benson was the only serious menace to the telephone call, apart from Philip; she asked Lady MacIan if he had been to the heronry?

'No, not yet—my husband is taking him after lunch. But he has seen my lily-border.' Lady MacIan's ruling passion was for lilies, which she grew with outstanding success; Julia glowed about lilies for some time, and then ventured a question about the telephone.

'Is that your only instrument?' she asked, indicating a cream-coloured set on a desk in the window.

'Oh no—I got my husband to have one put into his study downstairs only last month; it was getting rather toilsome for him to have to climb up here for all his estate calls. Why?' she asked, with a rather acute glance.

'Oh, my cousin Colin is expecting a business call presently; he ventured to give this number, on the off-chance that you might be so very kind as to ask us to lunch.'

'Now Miss Probyn, that is unkind of you. If Edina is anywhere within my reach, it is not in the least an 'off-chance' that I shall ask her to a meal, or to stay; it is a *certainty*,' Lady MacIan pronounced. 'How interesting Colin's job must be,' she added.

'Actually I think it all rather a bore,' Julia said, with careful carelessness. 'They seem to make such a fuss about things that so often prove to be nonsenses, in the end.' Her hostess laughed—but Julia had an uncomfortable feeling that she had not been deceived. At that moment a bell boomed through the house, proclaiming luncheon, and they all trooped down the wide stone staircase—in Highland houses of that period the drawing-room

is usually on the first floor—and into a big dining-room whose windows gave onto the island side, away from the Sound and towards the pine-wood which held the heronry. Julia was relieved that her humble unmarried status prevented her from having to sit next to her host; comfortably established on Lady MacIan's left, with Captain Benson opposite her, she listened to poor Edina shouting at Sir Ian, and Sir Ian positively bellowing at the old lady with the deaf-aid, repeating all Edina's observations, inaccurately. A very old, flat-footed butler, who reminded Julia of Forbes at Glentoran, handed round a perfect lobster Newburg, accompanied by faultless buttered rice.

'Goodness, how exquisite!' Julia exclaimed after her first mouthful. 'Have you got a Spanish cook?'

'No. I know Edina has her wonderful Olimpia, but I only have a Scottish cook—myself,' Lady MacIan added, with an engaging grin.

'Well I do congratulate you,' Captain Benson said. 'This is marvellous.'

'It's really so easy,' said Lady MacIan. 'That wonderful affinity between sherry and lobster—and then lots of cream. I admit scraping all the fat out of the lobster-shells and beating it into the cream is rather toilsome, but I have taught my local kitchen-maid to do that.'

'But the *rice*,' the Captain persisted.

'Ah yes—well that I have to do myself.'

The lobster was followed by a chicken casserole with red wine—equally perfect.

'Madam, you are a genius!' Captain Benson exclaimed.

'Casseroles are the salvation of the modern house-wife,' said Lady MacIan calmly. 'This took *hours*—but I made it yesterday. I always cook a lot at a time, in case people turn up—if they don't, casseroles go on and on.'

The shouting at the other end of the table had momentarily died down; through the open windows came that strange sound, as of shingle on a beach, that nesting herons make.

'Oh listen—there they are!' Julia said.

'There are what?' Captain Benson asked.

'The herons—don't you hear them?'

He cocked an ear towards the windows. 'But can that be—' he began, when Edina thought of something else to shout at Sir

Ian, and all outer sounds were drowned.

'Yes, it was,' said Julia.

'I must get out there,' said Captain Benson urgently.

'You shall—just have coffee first,' said his hostess. 'How nice it is to have people here who care about birds *and* lilies,' she added, with a friendly smile at Julia.

As they were going up to the drawing-room for coffee the telephone rang, loudly, both upstairs and down. Sir Ian started to shuffle down again towards his study.

'Ian, I think this call may be for Mr. Monro—he's expecting one,' his wife said to him. She did not have to shout, as others did; she *aimed* her voice at him, and he heard her—but so did everyone else except the old lady with the deaf-aid, in this instance.

'All the same, I'd better go and see,' the old gentleman said, continuing his unsteady progress down the staircase.

'Edina, *sit* on the drawing-room telephone!' Julia hissed in her cousin's ear. 'Don't let anyone listen-in up there.'

'O.K.'

Suddenly the bell stopped ringing; the old butler emerged from the study into the hall.

'A personal call from London for a Mr. Monro. Have we a Mr. Monro here, my Lady?' he asked.

'Yes—tell them he's coming. Down you go, Colin.' She went down and took her husband by the arm. 'It is for Edina's brother,' she told him. 'Now come up and have coffee.'

Julia had had no chance so far to plan anything about Tobermory—as they all proceeded upstairs she whispered again to Edina.

'We may have to put in to Tobermory tomorrow night for Colin to meet someone. It's the quickest place, and it's pretty vital. Can you *guarantee* that Philip will, or must Colin land and go by bus? I must tell him, *now*, while he's telephoning.'

'Oh, I'll guarantee that,' Edina murmured back. 'I love Tobermory, and there are the MacAllens, too—it would be heavenly to see them. What's the good of coming all this way if one only sees Shearwaters and Grey Seals, and not one's chums? Tell Colin it's all right.'

'Bless you!' Julia flew down the stairs into the hall after Colin, but he had disappeared; she tried three or four doors before she

opened the one into the study, where she saw her cousin standing at the telephone.

'Well I'm not absolutely sure *where*, yet,' he said as she came in . . . 'Yes, I know Julia said Tobermory, but there's been no chance to settle anything . . . Oh, hold on—Julia's nudging my elbow.'

'Better let me speak to Julia,' the girl heard Hugh Torrens say; Colin handed over the receiver.

'Hugh, is it Colonel J. who's coming?'

'Yes.'

'Is he there with you? If so I'll tell him what to do—no good repeating everything twice over. Just tell him who I am.'

'He knows that—he says he knows you.'

'Oh yes—Berne three years ago, for ten minutes! All right—put him on.'

A fresh voice spoke.

'Miss P.?'

'That's right. You know the small town you're to come to?'

'I know what has been suggested.'

'Well, it's confirmed. When you get there, go to a very good tweed-shop—really the only one—and ask the proprietor for the best and quietest pub. We will check with him, and meet you there at opening time.'

'You don't know it's name?—the pub, I mean.'

'No—and I shouldn't mention it if I did! But Hugh says you know me by sight.'

'Of course. Who could forget you?'

'Very kind. Look, bring an oilskin and sou'-wester; it often turns rough up here.'

'Sea-boots?'

'Not unless you want to be drowned! Any form of sand-shoe or tennis-shoe is much better.'

'Right. I shall be seeing you, which is very nice. Au revoir.' He rang off.

'How do you know Tobermory's all right?' Colin asked.

'I asked Edina to fix that, and she guaranteed it. She'll cope with Philip,' Julia replied easily. 'She has friends there she wants to see.'

'How are we to manage this pub business? It all sounds very sketchy to me.'

‘Well I rather think the tweed merchant sells bottled drink as well, so he might have a small back room; if not, we meet up in the pub, and then we can bring the Colonel back onto the boat for supper. Too simple.’

‘Well thank God he knows you by sight,’ Colin said fervently.

Chapter 2

ENTERING the Sound of Mull from the north can be rough, especially if the wind is setting against the tide, which runs strongly round Ardnamurchan Point; once inside the Sound all is usually smooth going, and a swing to starboard brings one into the small, completely sheltered harbour of Tobermory—the little town stretching along one side of it, and gentle hills rising all round.

The *Mary Hathaway* ran pleasantly up from Inch-Ian, but off Ardnamurchan it was quite rough; they had to reef, and Philip needed all his skill. Poor Captain Benson became violently seasick, and was not quick enough to arrange this performance to leeward—the deck became embarrassingly messy, hampering the crew's dealings with the sails.

At this juncture a large powerful motor-cruiser, manned by three men in blue berets, which Reeder had noticed coming up the coast astern of them for some time, behaved very clumsily, passing them far too close, and to windward.

Now the rule of the sea still is that 'steam (or petrol) gives way to sail'—i.e. that vessels under their own power yield passage to sailing-boats, dependent on the wind. Philip Reeder was indignant; he had to go about to get the wind again.

'Take the name of that boat! Damned motorists!' he said angrily.

'She doesn't seem to have a name, only a number,' Julia said; she was swabbing down the deck.

'Well take that. One must report this sort of thing.'

'I have. Y.J. 631. I think they were just ignorant,' the girl said. She saw with dismay the Oban steamer approaching up the Sound—owing to this contretemps it looked as if they were going to be late for their appointment.

'Then go and write it down,' Philip commanded. 'Colin, go and help with the jib—we shall have to go about again.'

Julia obediently skittered down the steep companion-ladder and entered the letters and figures in her engagement-diary. 7

Poor Captain Benson, looking very green, lay on one of the seats in the saloon, his eyes closed; she went on deck again.

Once in Tobermory harbour they cast anchor, never a rapid process. By the time they had done so the steamer from Oban was pulling in to the quay.

'Let's put the dinghy down and get ashore, quick,' Julia said to Colin. As they began to lower the dinghy over the side their skipper came and addressed them.

'What are you two up to?'

'Julia wants to meet a boy-friend off the Oban steamer,' Colin said, grinning, as the small boat splashed into the water. 'Hell! Where are the steps?'

The steps were found, and the two cousins rowed furiously across to the high stone-built quay; they tied their tiny craft to an iron ring, ran up a flight of wet steps, and walked along the broad quay and street combined, looking for the tweed-shop. 'Goodness, can he have moved?' Julia said anxiously. 'It used to be this way.'

The tweed-shop hadn't moved, and soon they found it; but they were not in time; Colonel Jamieson was sauntering along the pavement outside it, and presently turned in.

'What a curse!' Colin muttered. 'Now we shall have no idea which pub Robertson tells him to go to.'

'Can't we follow him?'

'I suppose we shall have to.' He looked up and down along the unusual street, with shops on one side and water on the other; barely a hundred yards away three men in blue berets were walking in their direction.

'There are those types off the motor-boat. I don't like this,' Colin said. 'Do you suppose they did that deliberately?'

'No, I think they're just ignorant. Don't be so suspicious, Colin.'

'Well, let's go in at once and contact Jamieson.'

'Then where shall we talk?'

'Oh, you can fix something. Don't call him by his name, though.'

They went into the shop. Colonel Jamieson had already caused a display of Harris tweeds to be spread out on a counter; he was fingering them carefully, and discussing their merits with the proprietor.

'You can watch the door, and tell me if those creatures do come in,' Julia murmured in her cousin's ear; then she strolled up, very casually, to the counter draped with tweeds.

'Mr. James! How extraordinary to meet you here!' she exclaimed. 'What on earth are *you* doing in Tobermory?'

The proprietor looked on with satisfaction. For a customer to meet a friend in his shop is usually good for trade.

'Just a little tour of the Highlands,' the Colonel replied; the faintest of winks, almost imperceptible, showed her that he had registered 'Mr. James' as his name in Tobermory. 'You, apparently, are yachting with your relations as usual,' he added, with a glance at her clothes.

'Yes. You must come and meet them—I don't think you have, yet. But don't let me interfere with your purchases. Which of these lovely tweeds are you going to buy?'

'Well how do you like this?' He raised a loop of a rather loud check.

'Oh *no*—much too conspicuous. Why don't you have this one? The water-lily blue?' She held up a length of a quite plain tweed, the colour of aquamarine mixed with chinese white.

'Why do you call it "water-lily"?' the Colonel asked, genuinely surprised.

'The dye is made from the roots of wild water-lilies, Sir,' Mr. Robertson put in. 'They make it in North Uist. The lady seems to know about tweeds.' Julia realised, with relief, that the shop-keeper had failed to recognise her, or at least to recall her name.

Colonel Jamieson bought enough of the water-lily tweed for a country suit; while it was being measured and parcelled up Julia went over to Colin at his stance by the door.

'Are they anywhere about?'

'No, they've gone into a pub.'

'Well when he's got his tweed I thought we might potter along that path round the head of the bay and get our talking over there, instead of a pub, and then take him aboard for supper. If Philip takes to him, he might make less fuss about going back to the Erinishes.'

This plan was put into operation. The Colonel, his rather large parcel of tweed under his arm, greeted Colin only with a grin as they emerged from the shop, and the three of them walked casually down the quay-cum-street, and turned off to the left

along the narrow wooded pathway round the head of the bay.

'Now, what is all this?' the Colonel asked; there was a wooden bench beside the path, and they sat on it. 'Exactly what have you seen?'

They told him—Julia left the narrative to Colin in the main. The Colonel lit a pipe, puffed, and considered.

'You say this wireless aerial came straight up out of the ground?' he asked at length.

'Yes—barely five yards away from us. Painted blue—camouflage against both sea and sky! When it had gone down again we saw the metal socket that held it.'

'And then you found the batteries?'

'Yes—long-duration metal ones; the sort that only have to be renewed about once every six months.'

'I *know*, Colin—you don't have to tell me.'

'Sorry, Sir.'

The Colonel puffed again at his pipe.

'Well, obviously I have got to see all this,' he said—'though your descriptions are so admirably clear that I think I know already what this installation is, and its uses.' He paused. 'Do you think your brother-in-law will take me back to see it?'

Colin looked worried.

'Philip is all set to go out to Heskeir to see Great Grey Seals,' he replied unhappily.

'Well, I suppose we could hire a boat to take us out there?'

'Not so easy,' Julia said—'and surely the fewer who are in on this, the better? No. Come back and have supper on board, and make up to Philip; you don't have to make up to Edina—though you'll want to, no doubt!—she will agree to anything Colin asks, and in the end Philip will do anything *she* wants.'

'Colin is very lucky,' the Colonel said, knocking out his pipe on the edge of the bench. 'So am I, in this instance.'

'Sir, there is one thing that is bothering me,' Colin said. 'We have a man on board who was foisted on us by some neighbours of my sister's, because he's supposed to be mad on Shearwaters, which breed on those islands. But none of us really knows anything about him; he might have been planted, I thought.'

'Name?' the Colonel asked.

'A Captain Benson. I thought perhaps you might want to put through a query.'

But the Colonel was laughing.

'Oh, poor old Benson! No, he's genuine enough—I've known about him and his birding all my life.'

'You're sure?'

'Dead sure.'

'He perked up rather when Julia mentioned electronics,' Colin said doubtfully. The Colonel turned and looked rather sharply at the girl.

'Why did you mention electronics?' he asked.

'Because he—Captain Benson—was talking about how Manx Shearwaters find their way across the ocean; he said they must have radar in their heads, and I said electronics. I don't know in the least what the word means—it was simply to say something,' Miss Probyn replied, quite unperturbed.

'She was just mopping up the Captain—her usual occupation with men,' Colin said, grinning a little. 'Only he did perk up at the word, didn't he, Julia?'

'Yes, a bit. Only really I thought he was perking up at *me* for knowing it,' Julia said frankly. Colonel Jamieson laughed out loud.

'I gather your cousin is right in his assessment of your methods,' he said. He turned to Colin. 'I really don't think you need worry about old Benson,' he said. 'He's really rather famous as an ornithologist.'

'Does he know *you*?—and what you do?'

'No; we've never met.'

'Well we'd better stick to "Mr. James", I think,' Julia said. 'But we must worry about him to some extent, because unless we can get him off the boat, where is Colonel Jamieson to sleep? There are only five berths.'

'There's that wire hammock that lets down off the wall in the fo'c's'le,' Colin said.

'But the mattress was thrown overboard because it smelt, and there are no blankets,' his cousin observed.

'Don't worry—I brought a flea-bag in my kit. The fo'c's'le hammock will do me perfectly,' the Colonel said. 'The only important thing is to persuade your Skipper to go back to these peculiar islands.'

'Yes, well let's go aboard and have supper, and settle all that,' Julia said, getting up off the rather damp seat.

'I've booked a room in the hotel here for tonight,' Colonel

Jamieson said. 'So the hammock will only be wanted when we put to sea.'

As they walked back along the narrow path towards the road they met the three men in blue berets off the motor-cruiser; both Julia and Colin studied their faces carefully. Two were young, snub-nosed, and fair; the third man was older, with marks of smallpox round his jaw. This encounter led Colin to recount the small episode at the entrance to the Sound.

'You got the boat's name?' the Colonel asked.

'It's number—it had no name,' Julia said. 'I've got it written down.' She slapped her trouser pocket.

'Well, that is something that might be gone into,' Colonel Jamieson said, as they emerged onto the road. 'Would there be time?'

Julia had been thinking, and spoke again.

'Colin, I think you'd better row out and tell Edina that there'll be one extra for supper, while the Colonel telephones. Then you can come back and fetch us.'

'Why don't you come with me?' the young man asked.

'Oh, my usual nosey-parkering!' the girl said blithely, as they reached the wet sea-worn steps. 'Breeze off, Colin.'

At his hotel the Colonel did some telephoning to a London number; Julia supplied him with the letters and figures 'Y.J. 631', but on the telephone he said, 'Two letters: last but one and tenth—got that? Now three digits—sixth, third, and first. Right.' Then he and Julia had a drink in the quiet and almost wholly deserted lounge.

'How does one get to Loch Roag?' he asked presently. 'Do you know?'

'Oh yes. It's on the Atlantic side of The Long Island, Lewis and Harris, you know—Dun Carloway, that wonderful broch, is up there. If one wasn't sailing one would take the steamer to Stornoway, and go on by car, I imagine. Why?'

'If possible I should like to get there. We have had reports—rather vague—of an installation in that area. Since I am up here I thought I might look into it.'

'Oh glory! I don't know if we shall ever persuade Philip to go to Loch Roag. Still, we might try. Edina likes pre-history, and Callernish isn't far off, as well as the broch.'

'What is Callernish?'

'Oh, the Stonehenge of the North—a great stone circle and avenue. It's marvellous.' She finished her drink, and got up.

'We'd better go—Colin will be back at the quay by now.' As they walked along towards the steps she said, laughing her slow laugh—'By the way, you're supposed to be a boy-friend of mine—that was the excuse Colin put up to Philip for our coming here.'

'What an agreeable assignment! Shall you mind if I play my part? I should like to very much,' he said, giving her a peculiarly engaging smile. Julia blushed a little.

'Well so long as you don't *overplay* it,' she said.

Colin was waiting, and rowed them across to the yacht. On the way he informed them that the hammock trouble had already resolved itself—Captain Benson still felt very ill, and had decided to go home on tomorrow's steamer. 'So you'll have a perfectly decent berth, if we can get Philip to go back to the Erinishes. You realise that he has no idea what we've found?'

'I must decide whether I'd better tell him, after we've met,' the Colonel said. 'Does your sister know?'

Julia replied before Colin could speak. 'She knows there's something up, connected with Colin's job; she half-guessed, and I had to tell her that he *was* on the job, so as to get to Inch-Ian to telephone.' She paused. 'And she knows that you're not really my boy-friend,' she added, laughing a little. Colin blushed.

'Julia, you *are* silly.'

'Not at all, my boy,' the Colonel said. 'One has to know what one's role is, to play it properly.' He gave Julia a glance which, to her vexation, made her blush a little too; her ready blushes always exasperated her, delightful as they were to the onlooker, staining her golden skin with a deep rose.

'Colin, don't row so fast,' she now said. 'How are we to get Philip to go back to the Erinish Islands? We must concert something, unless you come clean to him. If we say that Mr. James is mad on Shearwaters too he'll drag him ashore on Erinish Mor, which is no good at all.'

The Colonel intervened—people were always preventing poor Colin from answering questions addressed to him.

'Miss Probyn, suppose we leave this for the moment, till I have met Mr. Reeder, and made up my own mind as to what action to take about him. If I don't think it advisable to "come clean",

as you so inelegantly call it, I could be an archaeologist who wants to inspect Cromwell's forts.'

'That's a good idea,' Colin said. 'Though mind you, there are forts on Erinish Mor too.'

'That, I think, we could leave to your cousin, and your so co-operative sister.'

'Well if we don't want Philip to come ashore, he'll probably be perfectly happy fiddling about with the boat,' Colin said, as the dinghy drew alongside the *Mary Hathaway*.

'Good. Meanwhile, I hope my non-girl-friend will insist on rowing me ashore tonight, so that we can talk?'

'Oh very well. What fun to be a bogus girl-friend!'

Philip Reeder's tall bearded figure loomed above them as Colin climbed on board.

'Here you are at last—good.' He held out a hand to Julia to help her up the steps. 'This is my friend Mr. James,' Julia said, as the Colonel scrambled up after her.

'How do you do? Glad to see you. Come down and have a drink, and something to eat.'

'Something to eat,' was a splendid supper. Edina had gone buying at Inch-Ian to some purpose, and had scoured Lady MacIan's garden; there were fresh green peas, roast ducks, and cream and stewed raspberries. Poor Captain Benson missed all this; he was supping Benger's Food (laboriously made by his kind hostess) on the Skipper's bunk. Colonel Jamieson and Philip Reeder got on splendidly; both had been 'Desert Rats' in the last war, and though they had not actually met they had endless friends in common, and discussed their experiences.

'Why did you take to the Merchant Navy?' Colonel Jamieson (or Mr. James) asked at one point.

'Oh I love the sea—and I was on a charming run. What was your rank, by the way?'

'Colonel.'

'Oh. Funny—I never heard of a Colonel James.'

'Why should you? Colonels were as the sand on the seashore,' this Colonel said. Over coffee and Benedictine—very rarely produced on the *Mary Hathaway*, and a great sign of approval—Philip said,

'Where are you going next? We couldn't help you at all, I suppose? We're just cruising; and as poor Benson has to leave us, there's a spare bunk.'

Under the table Julia noiselessly clapped her hands.

'Well really you could, very much,' the Colonel replied. 'I've always been something of an archaeologist, and since the War I've gone in for it quite a lot. I'm really up here because, in the first place, I want to see those Cromwellian forts on the Erinish Islands.'

'Oh Lord! We've just been there.'

'Oh, what a pity! It doesn't seem very easy to persuade a boat here to take one out, and anyhow I gather there's nowhere to sleep.'

'Oh Philip, couldn't we go back?' Edina said. 'I never got ashore there at all, or saw any Shearwaters; I was simply washing and cooking, as usual!'

'Well, I don't see why not,' her husband said, with unusual benignity. 'Poor Edina!—you do have it rather hard. Could you start tomorrow?' he asked his guest.

'Darling, tomorrow we're going to lunch with the MacAllens, come hell and high water!' his wife said firmly. 'I must sometimes see my friends, when we are up here. But the day after, Mr. James?'

'That will do me perfectly,' the Colonel said. 'How exceedingly kind, Mrs. Reeder.'

In the long late twilight of the Highland summer Julia rowed Colonel Jamieson back to the quay, across the darkening waters towards the bright lights on the shore.

'You've brought that one off,' she said gaily. 'Well done you! Keep at it with Philip and you may get him to take you to Loch Roag.'

'What a percipient person your cousin is,' he said. 'She really arranged it.'

'Yes—there are no flies on Edina,' Julia replied, as she manoeuvred the dinghy in to the steps. 'Look—Colin or I will call tomorrow evening and arrange the drill for our sailing. With Philip it's generally a case of getting out on the tide—which may mean *any* hour. Good night.'

'Good night, skilful accomplice.'

Two mornings later 'any hour' proved to be 5.30 a.m. Julia and Colin rowed ashore the evening before and conveyed these disagreeable tidings to the Colonel.

'Oh, no matter. I have an alarm clock, and a tea-making

apparatus. I'll be on the quay with my baggage at 5.15.'

'A regular old soldier, aren't you?' Julia said.

'Well I don't propose to "fade away" just yet,' Jamieson replied. 'See you tomorrow morning.'

At 5.30 a.m. sharp next day the *Mary Hathaway's* anchor was hauled up on the automatic winch, and she sailed serenely out of the pretty harbour, in the early morning light, on her jib and foresail. Out in the Sound the big mainsail was hauled up-- 'Mr. James' earned yet more of the Skipper's approval by his skilful and muscular hauling on the sheets in this process.

'Do you do much sailing?' Philip Reeder asked his new guest, slightly turning the wheel to swing the yacht southward as they approached the mouth of the Sound.

'Whenever I can. I don't own a boat, but two friends of mine do, and if it's at all possible I crew for one or other of them in the Fastnet race. This is a lovely boat,' he added--'she seems to handle so easily.'

'She was built for the Fastnet,' Reeder said, more pleased than ever. 'I'll just get her round the corner, and then you shall try her yourself.' And when they had emerged from the Sound it was the Colonel who steered the yacht down to the Erinish Islands, to Edina's and Julia's amazement--though the Skipper took the wheel himself to slide the boat into the small anchorage.

On the run down Julia had taken Edina to some extent into her confidence.

'I want to take my chum onto Erinish Beg, to show him those silly forts--he's mad to see them. Couldn't Colin put you and Philip ashore on Mor, and then come back and drop us? I mean, not all in one party?'

'Julia, is this really *something*?' her cousin asked.

'Oh, how do I know? Last time I thought it was, and it was a bosh shot--I got the brush-off,' Julia replied truthfully.

'The trouble with you is that you never *do* know,' her cousin said, rather sternly.

'I know--awful! But I do rather like this one,' Julia said--she thought she was saying it in Colin's interest. 'Don't you think he's nice?'

'Yes, very. Far better than that poor creature Torrens.' (Edina had met Major Torrens at Mrs. Hathaway's house in London,

and had not liked him.) 'I think you couldn't do better,' Edina said. 'But don't play the fool.'

'I'll try not to. But will you fix it that we get onto Erinish Beg *without* you and Philip in tow?'

'I'll try.'

Whatever Mrs. Reeder tried to do she usually succeeded in doing. After eating cold duck and salad in the calm little anchorage, she insisted on Colin's rowing her and her husband ashore on Erinish Mor so that she might see the Shearwaters' nesting-burrows; Colin then returned to the yacht, picked up Julia and the Colonel, and ferried them the short distance to Erinish Beg. There, after climbing up the gully, the cousins led the Secret Service man across to the Atlantic side of the island, and showed him what they had found only three days earlier.

Besides the metal socket out of which the blue-painted wireless aerial had arisen there was, set into the turf, a shallow plastic dome or cap some sixteen inches across; this Colin removed. He had brought a torch with him this time, and by its light, in turns, they all three examined this curious installation. Below the plastic dome was a metal tube in some light alloy, about four inches in diameter; it was not firmly fixed, it oscillated quite gently and easily when touched by Jamieson's hand, but only very slightly—about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in any direction.

'Ah! I think I understand,' the Colonel said. 'Move aside Colin, and give me the torch.'

He peered down into the interior of the tube. It was really a sort of cone, expanding at its lower end to a breadth of at least a foot; below this was a concave metal saucer with a metal spike sticking up into the base of the cone; all over the saucer smaller spikes, little more than an inch high, projected upwards. A flexible plastic pipe, metallised on the outside, led down from the top of the cone, beside the saucer, into what appeared to be a large aluminium case sunk in the ground.

'Yes, the works,' the Colonel muttered, half to himself. 'Of course without digging we can't see how big it is—and we don't want to dig at this stage. Four-foot cube, I expect.' He straightened up, and Julia and Colin, in their turn, peered down at this strange apparatus.

'What on earth is it?' Colin asked.

'I'm afraid I know,' Colonel Jamieson said. 'Something

planted by our dear Allies the Russians.'

'Here? But *why*? What does it do?'

'I'll go into that later. The wireless aerial you saw of course reports to them. Now, could you show me those batteries? And we'll just put back the plastic cover.'

Julia and Colin pulled off the turfs which they had carefully stamped back into the ground so shortly before, revealing a metal chest with a clipped-on lid; the Colonel removed the lid, and examined the interior.

'Yes, just what you said, Colin. These work the whole outfit, and need only be renewed once in six months.' As he helped the others to stamp the turfs back into position he said—'This is quite important. But now I really *must* get to Loch Roag somehow, and try to check there.'

'Well if you keep on with Philip as well as you've done so far, he might take you there,' Julia was saying, when Colin gave a sudden exclamation.

'Oh look! There it goes again!' This time Colonel Jamieson saw for himself the sky-blue wireless mast rising out of the ground within a few feet of where he stood—a most uncanny spectacle.

'Good Lord!' He stood watching the slender thing for a moment or two. 'One of their bloody satellites must have been going over just now,' he said.

'And now the wireless is reporting home?' Colin asked.

'Precisely. My God, they have got a nerve, planting this sort of thing right off our coasts! Clever, too; they've chosen an ideal place.'

'But why want reports about satellites from Scotland?' Colin asked.

Before Colonel Jamieson could reply Julia held up her hand and said—'Listen!' They all did so, and heard, rather faintly, the distant phut-phut of a motor-boat's engine. Colin looked out seawards.

'It's that stinking motor-cruiser. Let's lie down!' he said, with unusual firmness; his companions obediently flattened themselves on the yellowish grass.

'From sea-level they can't see us like this,' Colin said. 'Did you get anything on that motor-boat, Sir?'

'Nothing definite, before I left. The owner was alleged to be a Swede. But it was being followed up.'

'Oh well, we all know about the Swedes, poor wretches,' Julia said. 'Sort of counter-neutrals, don't you think? Wasn't Quisling a Swede?'

'No, a Norwegian, you poor ignoramus,' her cousin told her.

'Oh well, they're all Scands, anyhow, and all petrified of the Russians, poor devils.'

The noise of the motor-cruiser's engine was now quite loud. Colin cautiously raised his head.

'They're just below us; from there they can't see a thing. I suggest that we hare across and get the dinghy over to the other island before they come round into the anchorage—if they do.'

'Very sound,' the Colonel said.

'Keep low near the forts, though,' Colin insisted—half-crouching, they ran across the island, scrambled down the gully, and rowed across to Erinish Mor. They had already beached the dinghy, and were well on their way up the bluffs by the time that the motor-cruiser had picked its way through the mass of reefs and islets round the southern end of Erinish Beg, and appeared off the mouth of the anchorage.

'There they are—snooping again,' Colin exclaimed angrily.

'Just wait a minute,' the Colonel said. 'All this wants thinking about.' He sat down on a rock and lit a cigarette, after offering his case to Julia. 'How well do you know your brother-in-law?' he asked the young man.

'Hardly at all, really, except that he's a good sailor,' Colin replied. 'I'm almost never at home. Julia knows him much better than I do.'

'Miss Probyn?'

'If you mean, is Philip likely to turn into a Burgess or a Maclean, the answer is No,' Julia said. 'He's been an officer in the British Merchant Navy for years, and he comes of a very old, and very *rich*, Northumbrian family—his father was a Bart. Rich people are hardly ever Commies—and Bart's sons even more seldom!'

Colonel Jamieson gave his brief laugh, which sounded like a cough.

'Thank you. Well all that being so, I think I shall put the whole situation flat out to Mr. Reeder. I must get to Loch Roag, after what I've seen here—and probably much the quickest and most anonymous way would be on this yacht.'

'If you tell Philip what you've seen here, he'll want to go and examine it all for himself,' Colin said gloomily.

'Oh no he won't—all he wants is to get out to Heskeir and see the Great Grey Seal pups,' Julia countered.

After they had collected the Reeders, and eaten an ample tea on board, the Colonel said to his host—'Could I have a word with you on deck, Skipper?'

Mr. Reeder looked a little startled; whether at the request, or at being called 'Skipper'—which in fact he rather liked—Julia couldn't be sure. The two men climbed the companion-ladder and sat on some piles of rope just aft of the mast. A couple of hundred yards away the motor-cruiser had also cast anchor, but her dinghy was still on her deck.

'There's that beastly motor-boat; they nearly fouled me two days ago,' Reeder said venomously. 'They don't know the rules of the sea.'

'They may be connected with what I want to talk to you about,' Jamieson said. 'Reeder, I must apologise—I've come here with you on false pretences.'

'Aren't you one of Julia's boy-friends? That's what Colin said.'

'No, much as I should like to be—I've only met her once before in my life. And my name isn't James; I am Colonel Jamieson, and I'm in Intelligencce.'

Philip seized on the name.

'Jamieson? Then you were in the Borderers! Why on earth didn't you tell me at once? I knew I'd never heard of a Colonel James.'

'I had to use a false name in Tobermory.'

'I don't much like this,' Reeder said. 'Use a false name ashore, well and good; but if you come on board my boat, as my cousin's friend, why not give me your real name?'

'I have given it you now—barely twenty-four hours late. And I have apologised. I'm sorry, Reeder—I repeat that.'

Philip Reeder reflected.

'I suppose you're one of Colin's bosses,' he said then—'and that it was you he wanted to ring up from Inch-Ian. Has he found some funny-business here?'

'Yes—very funny indeed, and fairly dangerous.'

'Why dangerous?'

‘Probably tracing satellites—for no good purposes. I can’t explain it all now, it would take too long—and anyhow I won’t. But there is an installation which isn’t *ours* on Erinish Beg, I’ve seen it this very afternoon; your cousin and your brother-in-law spotted it when you came here three days back. And there’s another one suspected, near Loch Roag. You asked me two nights ago if you could help me at all; well you could, very much, if you would take me to Loch Roag.’

‘I don’t see why not,’ Reeder said. ‘I’m all for doing down the Russians. How big is the hurry?’

‘The sooner the better—not desperate. It may be only a rumour, but I want to make sure.’

‘Well I think that’s all right. I want to go to Heskeir tomorrow to see the Great Grey Seals; then we can spend the night at Canna, on to Rodel next day, and push through the Sound of Harris the day after that, up to Loch Roag. It’s a good anchorage, and my wife would like to take a look at Callernish. I say, are you *really* an archaeologist?’

‘In a rather amateurish way, yes. F.S.A.Scot., and all that.’

Mr. Reeder knew that Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland were not necessarily all experts; but the name denoted a certain degree of knowledge and interest.

‘So you can pose as one if any questions arise about your howking?’

Colonel Jamieson grinned at that very Scottish word for any form of digging or excavation.

‘Yes, I can talk my way out of anything of that nature.’

‘Good. Now why do you think that motor-cruiser may have anything to do with Colin’s find here?’

‘Various reasons. Whether you saw her or not, I suspect that her crew saw *you*, here, and followed you into Tobermory; and they were rather in evidence that first evening while we were ashore there. Now they’ve followed you down here again. Perhaps all coincidences; perhaps not.’

‘I quite forgot to report her,’ Reeder said. ‘I meant to check on her owner first.’

‘I did that. A Swedish name, but there is some mystery about her. By the way, can I telephone from this place where we anchor tomorrow night?’

‘Canna?—I don’t know. I should think you could from Rodel

in Harris. But what do we do about her tonight? This place is as lonely as the grave—we don't want a set of Swedes or Russians coming aboard and trying on anything funny.'

'I should be very much surprised if they did that—in fact I'm rather surprised that they should have anchored so close to you; one would expect them to try to keep out of sight as far as possible—though if they are what we think I don't doubt that they want to go up and see if you've been monkeying about with their machinery, when it gets dark.'

'If they want to go ashore on Erinish Beg this is the only place where they can anchor,' Reeder said. 'And anyhow it won't *get* dark, not so as you'd notice, as far North as this—it's only June. Twilight all night, practically.'

'Well I don't think we need do anything. Your cousin and I put everything back as it was; they won't be able to be certain whether we've been there or not.'

'Don't you want them to know you know?' Reeder enquired curiously. 'Won't this machine be put out of action?'

'Oh naturally, in due course. But leaving it undisturbed for the moment may make it easier to find others.'

'Why, do you imagine there are more than this one you want to look for at Loch Roag?'

'Indeed yes—probably a whole series, all down the western coasts.'

'Well, I wish you would tell me what it's all in aid of.'

'Sometime I will. But this is highly "classified" information, and it would take a long time to explain. Do you mind very much if we leave it for the moment?'

'No.' Suddenly Reeder grinned broadly in the depths of his brown beard.

'Take a bet of a fiver that I've guessed what it's all about?'

Colonel Jamieson looked a little startled, but—'Yes, willingly,' he said.

'Done! Correcting the map!'

This time the Colonel looked really astonished. It was with some difficulty that he manufactured a laugh.

Chapter 3

THE party on the *Mary Hathaway* passed a quiet night in their anchorage. Colin and the Skipper kept their ears cocked for any sounds from the neighbouring boat, especially that of the dinghy being lowered. After supper they all went and sat on deck—at 10.30 p.m. the sun was still shining brightly on the hills; but they had put to sea at 5, and presently the skipper decreed bed.

'I'll just sit and smoke here for a while,' Jamieson said to his host—'if you don't mind.'

'So will I.'

But about an hour later they heard the motor-cruiser's anchor being drawn up, and then the sound of her engine as she chugged out of the anchorage—her dinghy had never been lowered at all.

'Done them this time, apparently,' Reeder said with satisfaction, and he and his guest put up the riding-lights, and performed the usual last nocturnal rites over the side of the boat; then they went below.

The visit to Heskeir next day was not wholly successful, as far as the Grey Seals were concerned. On a very calm day it is possible to nose fairly close round the rocks where the Great Grey Seals breed, but it was not a particularly calm day. After leaving the Erinishes the *Mary Hathaway* ran north to Heskeir, out in the open sea. The breeze was freshening all the time. 'Bother!' Philip Reeder muttered. When they reached the spot he went in as close as he dared, but the seas were quite heavy, and since he could not look for seals through his binoculars as well as steer, he was rather frustrated. He handed the field-glasses to his wife. 'Edina, can you see anything on those rocks?'

Edina, twiddling knobs and peering through the Zeisses, said:

'Yes. There are seven creatures bigger than donkeys and much the same colour, but without legs, lying out on the rocks, and at least five white blobs near them.'

'Oh God! What do you mean by blobs? Here, give me the glasses, and take the wheel. Keep her at that.'

His wife obediently took the wheel, and endeavoured to keep the yacht 'at that', i.e. on the same course.

'Yes, five pups,' Philip exclaimed triumphantly. 'I wish we could get nearer inshore! Jamieson, care to have a look? Lovely creatures.'

Julia, who couldn't have cared less about Great Grey Seals, was startled by Philip's use of the name Jamieson instead of 'James'. There must have been a lot of coming clean on deck the previous evening, she reflected. Colin evidently had the same idea; he edged along the planking 'o sit beside her, and muttered in her ear—

'How does he know his name is Jamieson? Did you tell him?'

'No. He must have done that himself—J. I mean.'

'I wonder how much else Philip's been told?'

'Enough to take us to Loch Roag, which is what matters.'

'How do you know that?'

'J. told me this morning; he said Philip had been so kind. Colin, do you know his Christian name?'

'No. We call him Jimmy.'

'Well do find out.'

'Why? Do you want to start Christian-naming him?'

'Might do, at any moment! But all this James-ing and J-ing is so tiresome. I like to be informed.'

'So do I,' Colin said. 'Everything seems to be getting quite out of control.'

'Well it's the Colonel who has to control things now, isn't it? So you can relax.'

Her cousin scowled at her.

'If only you were more responsible!' he muttered.

'Well I've told you all I know—if that's irresponsible, it's just too bad.' She took his hand, where the nervous thumb was beginning to jerk, and pressed it gently. 'Colin, sweet, don't be sour!' She laughed at her own juxtaposition of words. 'You know I'm always on your side.'

Colonel Jamieson, after having studied the Grey Seals and their five blobs of pups, handed the field-glasses back to his host—he did this just in time to observe Julia taking her cousin's hand, and her obviously affectionate expression as she bent her golden-tawny head towards Colin's black one, and spoke gently to him. He was shocked to find how much this small scene disturbed him,

after less than three days in her company. Of course she was very beautiful, in a rather unusual way; but when one was on a job, one had to stick to it. 'Stick to the job,' the Colonel told himself, and looked away.

They sailed on to Canna. In the entrance to Canna's admirably sheltered little harbour is a rock only visible at half tide; but they made their way in safely past this obstacle. It was early, and when they had had tea they went ashore.

Canna is a small sweet island, with high ground rising on its northern side; here is its most peculiar feature, a hill so full of metalliferous rock that within a range of several miles it puts all ships' compasses out of action; it is called, rather ironically, 'Compass Hill'. Colonel Jamieson wanted to telephone, and to his great satisfaction there proved to be a telephone in the Post Office.

'Is Captain Brown still in?' he asked when he got the London number. 'Oh, good—put me through, please.' Pause. 'Nigel? Jimmy here. . . . From Canna. Yes, the first report is confirmed up to the hilt; I saw it myself yesterday. . . . Oh, just what one supposed. Now I'm on my way to look into what you wanted investigated. . . . On a private yacht; very convenient! Did you get any more on that Swedish-owned boat? . . . Goodness, you are slow! Do find out; she was about again last night. . . . No, I'd rather report when I get back; the posts are a bit slow from these parts. . . . Well I will if I can; telephones aren't all that abundant either. . . . My good man, I've no idea where from; *as* I can and *when* I can! You stir your stumps about that boat; I'm not losing any time, but I think you are.' He rang off.

The others had been idling about outside. Not altogether idling, in Edina's case; she had acquired bread, milk, butter, and vegetables, which they stowed in the dinghy—then they set out to explore. Edina wanted to look for wild-flowers, the Colonel to find a Celtic Cross.

'Well it must be up that way,' Julia said, pointing westwards.

'Yes. Would you care to come and see it?' He had done his job for the moment by telephoning; this was merely a diversion. Julia agreed, and the two set off together; Philip wanted to climb the Compass Hill; Colin went off alone.

The cross was not typical: it was short and stumpy, without the usual long shaft; there was however the circular central boss; some of it broken away. The Colonel made notes in a pocket-book.

'Why on earth do you suppose ordinary West Highland crosses are so different to any others?—except the Irish ones?' Julia asked, when he closed his notebook and came and sat beside her on a small grassy mound. 'European crosses practically never have a circle in the centre, and Maltese crosses are square. Why should they be so odd up here?'

'I've often wondered the same thing myself.' He was impressed by her question. 'Are you interested in archaeology?' he asked.

'Not really. I have a chum who is, and rubs my nose in it,' Julia said. 'But sometimes I notice things for myself. I always like to know *why*, if you follow me.'

'I do. I expect I might follow you quite a long way,' the Colonel said. His tone brought a faint ripe-apricot blush to Julia's cheeks; Jamieson almost blushed too—was he really going to make a fool of himself?

'I suppose someone will find out the reason some day,' he added, very casually. Neither he nor Julia could know that they would stumble on the most probable reason themselves, only a day or two later.

The other party had also been successful. Edina returned carrying a huge bunch of wild-flowers; Philip had a lump of what he thought was magnetic rock in his pocket; Colin had been to a small ruined castle, from which a Macdonald lady had lowered herself by a rope of knotted sheets to elope with her lover. 'This was a Macdonald island,' he said—'part of the Lordship of the Isles.'

'What a splendid phrase that is, The Lordship of the Isles,' the Colonel said. These exchanges took place over drinks in the cabin before supper.

'Yes, glorious,' Julia said. 'And you know the odd thing is that those crosses and tomb-slabs with the interlaced ornament are practically conterminous—is that the word?—with the boundaries of the Lordship of the Isles.'

'How on earth do you know that?' Philip asked.

'Oh yes, Philip; Geoffrey once showed me a map with dots on it—you know—for all the places with interlaced tomb-slabs; and then he laid over that a map showing the boundaries of the Lordship of the Isles; they fitted almost exactly.'

'Who is Geoffrey? One of your miserable cast-offs?' Philip enquired. Julia merely gave her burbling laugh; the Colonel

was fairly sure that 'Geoffrey' was the chum who habitually rubbed Julia's nose in archaeology, apparently to rather good effect.

Next morning they slept in, an agreeable change, and made a late start for the fairly short run to Rodel in Harris. There the Colonel took an active part in getting down the mainsail and putting the light 'C.Q.R.' anchor over the stern.

'Nice job, that anchor,' he said. 'I believe they use them for flying-boats.'

'Yes.' Philip lit a cigarette. 'The old ones were so heavy; an appalling job to get them up without an automatic winch. Rather interesting, really; I believe it's only the second change in anchor-design since the one Noah used on Ararat, or the Greeks off Troy.'

'What was the first change?' the Colonel asked, amused.

'The movable shank, so that the flukes could get a hold in more than one direction. But this is a magical affair; those two things like ploughshares set at an angle hold far better than any previous anchor did. I find I've only got the small-scale chart for the Sound of Harris, and it's a hell of a place,' he added gloomily.

'Why?'

'Oh, reefs and rocks everywhere. Someone will have to sit out on the bowsprit and keep watch.'

Edina's head appeared at the top of the companion-hatch.

'Tea,' she announced. 'Come along—I've got to go ashore and buy something to eat afterwards.'

After tea the Skipper remained on board to write up his log; the others piled into the dinghy and rowed ashore, Edina armed with a large pannikin for milk and a brightly-coloured rush basket of huge proportions. To Mrs. Reeder's dismay she learned that there was no shop of any sort nearer than Leverburgh, some miles away.

'Ye'll get bread at the hotel,' said a bearded man in a seaman's jersey, who stood lounging on the quay—'and likely Mistress Macrae up the road could let ye have some milk.' Edina enquired about meat.

'Ach no—Mistress Macrae might let ye have some eggs, or may be a cockrel.'

'Could you get the bread at the hotel?' Edina asked the

Colonel. 'Revolting "sliced loaves", most likely, but we must have something.' Then the cousins set off to try their luck at Mrs. Macrae's croft.

Colonel Jamieson went first to inspect the ancient chapel. It contains a number of those incised tomb-slabs with interlaced ornament which Miss Probyn had said were mainly to be found within the boundaries of the Lordship of the Isles. What a surprising creature she was, Jamieson thought, bringing out these curious items of information as it were from beneath her make-up and her general appearance of being a fashionable nit-wit. Moreover she clearly did, as she had said, 'notice things for herself'; he speculated, sitting on a stone in the small chapel, as to whether she deliberately put on an act of being a lovely fool.

Then the Colonel betook himself to the hotel for a drink, and if possible a gossip—often a useful occupation. The hotel was a low-built and rather rambling place, and appeared to be completely deserted; he went in and wandered about, and at last routed out a pleasant middle-aged woman, who served him with whisky; she sat by politely while he drank it. Jamieson asked how the fishing was going?—and then enquired if there was any trouble about poaching by foreign trawlers?

Oh yes, 'terrible', she told him. The French came right in to Barra, and sold scent and field-glasses, free of duty—'and the people there have no conscience; they just row out and buy the stuff.' The Colonel made sounds of disapprobation.

'But the Russian trawlers are the worst,' the middle-aged woman pursued. 'They don't sell anything, but at night they come close in, and fish away! 'Tis wrong—these are *our* waters, and our fish, and haven't our own men their living to make?'

The Colonel asked if there was no patrol-boat to keep an eye on the poachers?

'Ach, how often do *they* come round? Those ones know well enough that they are safe for their mischief nine nights out of ten.'

The Colonel paid for his drinks, bought his two loaves, and strolled up the road to meet Julia and Edina, well satisfied with his evening's work. Yes, Russian trawlers, so-called, could easily slip in at night to renew batteries, or even plant installations.

Edina and Julia, when he met them, were also quite pleased with themselves. The pannikin was full of milk, the Portuguese

basket held another pound of butter and two dozen fresh eggs; Julia was carrying a pair of cockerels by the legs—they kept quiet while she walked, but when she stood still they began to flap their wings.

‘Good Heavens, they’re alive!’ the Colonel exclaimed.

‘Yes—there won’t be time to hang them, so we must eat them fresh-killed. I’ve got a hamper on board. Fowls always have to be starved before they’re killed, or the meat is rank,’ Edina said.

‘How much you know! Who will kill them?’ the Colonel asked, half-fascinated and half-horrified.

‘Julia or I—we can both wring chickens’ necks. *Someone* has to be a little bit competent about the commissariat on this sort of cruise,’ Mrs. Reeder said cheerfully.

‘But who will pluck them?’ Colonel Jamieson asked, eyeing the flapping feathered objects.

‘I shall,’ Julia said. ‘I’m a nailer at plucking birds.’

Next day the Colonel saw for himself that Miss Probyn was indeed a ‘nailer’ at the very countrified task of plucking chickens. When the *Mary Hathaway* emerged into open water Edina took the two cockerels, one after the other, from the hamper, held the legs in her right hand, and with a swift jerk of her left wrist wrung their necks. ‘There you are,’ she said to her cousin—‘pluck away. Be quick—I want to get them into the pan warm.’

Julia carried the two corpses aft of the cockpit, went below and fetched an apron and a sack, and plucked at speed; clouds of feathers floated off behind the boat over the blue waters. The Colonel looked on, much interested. In an hour both birds were plucked clean, and Julia handed them over to her cousin.

‘There you are—still quite warm. Want me to draw them?’

‘No, I’ll do that.’ Mrs. Reeder disappeared below.

‘Why must they be cooked warm if they can’t be hung?’ the Colonel enquired, greatly intrigued by these sidelights on the food he had always taken for granted when he ate it. To his surprise Colin answered—Julia was busy shaking the feathers and fluff, first off the sack, then from her apron, overboard.

‘Because rigor sets in the moment a body gets cold, and lasts for roughly seventy-two hours, in the case of chickens. So if there’s no time to hang them till the rigor is past, you must cook them before it starts. Tough, in meat or birds, is simply another word for rigor.’

Philip Reeder cut into this dissertation sharply; he had more serious preoccupations. The Sound of Harris slants slightly north of west, and the wind had gone up a point or two into the north, and was now almost dead against them.

'We shall have to beat the whole way,' he said, 'and this hellish small-scale chart doesn't show half the rocks. Colin, you and Jamieson stand by to man the sheets and the jib—where's Edina?'

'Cooking the chickens,' Julia said.

'Then you go out along the bowsprit and shout if you see anything. Put up your hand, too—right if I'm to steer right, and left if I'm to steer left.' He did not trust Miss Probyn to be very clear about Port and Starboard.

Julia obediently went up into the bows, got astride the bowsprit, and made her way along it between the wire shrouds, somewhat encumbered by the jib-sheets; however she could soon get a foothold on the bobstay, the heavy wire which steadies the bowsprit, and continued along the narrow spar to within a few feet of its end. It was a fascinating position: as the big boat rose, plunged, and rose again over the waves she felt its every movement to the utmost, hanging poised only a few feet above the water—she loved it. But Colonel Jamieson was rather dismayed.

'Couldn't I do that?' he asked the Skipper, watching the graceful figure perched on the long narrow piece of timber, the lion-gold hair streaming in the wind as she went up and down, up and down.

'No!' Reeder answered shortly. 'I want you for the sheets. Julia's all right.'

The Sound of Harris is a difficult place to navigate at all times, even with a large-scale chart; many yachtsmen will not tackle it without a pilot. To 'reach' through it is not particularly easy; to beat through it, sailing diagonally on short tacks, can be rather frightening. Several times Julia, from her outlook-post, saw a great reef scarcely a hundred yards ahead bare its teeth, as the waters drew back from it with a snarl; then she shouted and stuck out a hand, Philip put the wheel hard over, Colin and Jamieson raced to the ropes, and the *Mary Hathaway* went about swiftly, sometimes missing the rock by a matter of yards. It was a hair-raising performance, and everyone shared the Skipper's relief when they were safely through and out in the open Atlantic,

with room to manoeuvre. Philip took the boat out a good long way, and then suggested that they should heave to and have something to eat.

'A snack or a meal?' his wife asked.

'Oh, let's have a decent meal, for pity's sake.'

'Right—we'll eat the chickens. Ready in ten minutes.'

The yacht was hove to, and the party sat down thankfully in the small saloon, where Edina had set out glasses and 'Gin and It'.

'That is a ghastly place,' Reeder said. 'I'll never try it again without a proper chart. You did very well, Julia,' he added.

'So glad,' Julia said, sipping her drink and smoking.

The Colonel turned to her.

'Weren't you in the least frightened, perched out on a limb like that?' he asked.

'Only of getting my shoes wet! I love being in the bows of any boat; always have. You feel the movement more.'

'Good God! Are you never seasick?'

'Never in my life. I simply love that feeling when the bows go down, and your stomach falls about four inches—I sometimes go on the Underground to get it in the lifts.'

'How appalling!' the Colonel said.

'Julia's like those anaesthetists who get a passion for sucking in the gas themselves, where the sea is concerned,' Reeder said. 'She's an addict. What about some food, Edina?'

Colonel Jamieson was interested to taste the chickens, cooked while they were still warm. The flavour, with Edina's herbs and onions, was excellent, but the texture of the meat was slightly gelatinous.

'Yes, they're always a big gluey,' Edina said. 'But not tough.'

During the meal they became uncomfortably aware of the strong Atlantic swell, coming in from the south-west; when they started on again they found that the wind had dropped slightly, and the *Mary Hathaway* rolled drunkenly—however they made fair progress on their northward course, with the sheet eased. But off the mouth of West Loch Tarbert the yacht rolled more sharply; at one point she lurched hard over to windward, loosening the sheet as the boom swung across the deck; on the return roll the boom came back, and the sheet drew taut, checking the movement of the great spar abruptly—suddenly there came a loud ominous crack.

'Good Lord! The boom's gone!' the Colonel exclaimed.

It had indeed; it had snapped about two-thirds of its length from the mast. There ensued a time of agitated activity. Philip put the boat up into the wind, his crew hauled in the mainsheet, and then proceeded to lower the mainsail. This brought the now useless boom onto the deck, where it came to rest on the bottom of the dinghy—which was being carried upside-down on the starboard side.

'That won't do,' Philip exclaimed. 'She's bending; she can't take that weight.'

'Better get the sail smothered first, hadn't we?' Jamieson said.

'Yes. Edina, take the wheel.'

When the boom breaks on a cutter-rigged yacht, which only has one mast, she is practically crippled; the *Mary Hathaway* was now so crippled, out in the open Atlantic, off a lee shore. Julia had gone below to write to Mrs. Hathaway, but the rushing tramplings on deck above her head soon brought her up. 'Start undoing the lacing along the boom,' Philip told her when she appeared.

'Cut them?'

'No! Untie, and unpick—don't cut anything unless I say so.'

'Okay,' Julia said; she realised that Philip was in a fearful tizzy about his lovely new mainsail.

Meanwhile the three men set about taking off the gaff (the much smaller spar which on old-fashioned boats supports the top of a cutter's mainsail) and stowing it; then they released the rings which fastened the sail to the mast-hoops, on which it is raised or lowered. All this had to be done very fast; the sail must be brought to deck level and 'smothered', i.e. crushed together, so that the wind could not get into it, while the yacht was bucking about in the heavy swell like an angry steer. It was a long job, however fast and hard they worked. At one point Julia asked for a marlin-spike to prize the cords undone. 'Can't spare it,' Philip said brusquely; Julia went below and fetched her nail-scissors, and used the joined points for her by no means easy task. The deck was covered with damp canvas, under which she had to burrow to get at the boom lacings; all this time the yacht was still rolling heavily, and the huge boom, as it was progressively released from the mast and the sail, began to flog about, menacing Edina, sitting at the wheel in the cockpit.

'Hi! Can't you make that wretched boom fast?' Philip's wife shouted to him. 'It'll brain me any moment.'

'Not yet—as soon as we can. Duck your head.'

The two young women remained in this extremely uncomfortable situation for some considerable time, Edina ducking her head when the boom lurched across her, Julia working away at the lacings, and constantly being toppled over into the cockpit by the huge piece of timber. The Colonel saw these goings-on with dismay.

'Can't we at least make the after-end fast?' he asked the Skipper—he was afraid that Miss Probyn might be knocked overboard.

'Presently,' Reeder said impatiently. 'We must finish getting the sail unbent first, in case the wind gets up.' The Colonel thought, rather indignantly, that his host was worrying more about his new mainsail than about his wife or his cousin. But at last the job was done; the mast-head tackle for lifting weights (curiously called a burton) raised the boom up off the dinghy, whose resilient timbers sprang back into place—it was moved a few feet forward, and the now useless boom was lashed at an angle along the starboard rail. But then the mainsail had to be disposed of. Folding and compressing a thousand superficial feet of stiff canvas is not easy; at one point Reeder stood on the tough material and stamped on it. Finally it was shoved down through the fore-hatch and stowed in the fo'c'sle. Then the weary crew dragged out the try-sail from a locker in the cockpit, bent it to the mast, and made fast the ropes which held it in position without either boom or gaff; finally it was hauled up into place.

'Right, let's try her,' Reeder said, taking the wheel; and indeed under this curious contraption—known, Heaven knows why, as a 'jury-rig'—the yacht proved to sail quite well. The wind, having done what damage it could, now blew steadily again; they sailed on northwards. The delay had made them late—the Colonel, to his great satisfaction, took a photograph after 10 p.m. of the Skipper's shadow flung, enormous, by the setting sun on the try-sail.

One of the supreme satisfactions of sailing is the curious exhilaration produced by normal habits broken up, by customary hours for sleep and meals turned topsy-turvy; one hails with delight the response to this treatment of a mind and body growing

perhaps a little stiff, but not yet grown rigid beyond repair. Colonel Jamieson tried to express something of this to Julia as they sat on deck after supper, eaten at 10.30 p.m.—Edina had scrounged some chives and parsley on Canna, and made them a superb omelette.

‘Yes, I know what you mean. One does get groovy in towns: always drinks before lunch, drinks before dinner—which must be about eight. Of course Spain is a help, though I don’t really care to dine perpetually at half-past ten—on land, I mean.’

This response satisfied the Colonel, casual as it was; he was asking Miss Probyn why she knew Spain so well when she interrupted him with an exclamation—‘Oh, do look at the gannets!’

The gannet, that enormous bird, conspicuous by its size, its snowy plumage, and the black tips to its wings is normally seen soaring high, patrolling for fish, or making spectacular plunges into the sea after its prey. But here, in groups of four or five, they were flying northwards—so fast that they overhauled the yacht—only a few feet above the water. ‘We must tell Philip,’ the girl said, getting lightly onto her feet and walking aft, to the Colonel’s amused dismay; he had hoped to prolong this agreeable conversation in the bows.

‘Philip, why are those gannets flying so low?’ she asked. ‘Do look.’

‘I never saw that before in my life,’ Reeder said, gazing at the birds—‘but then I don’t sail at night if I can help it.’

It was by now what passes for night in high latitudes in the month of June. The sun had set, leaving a broad reddish glow along the northern horizon; it was not truly dark, they could distinguish the white shapes of the great birds as they flew alongside and past the boat. This northern twilight has its own peculiar mystery, and Jamieson, to whom it was quite new, felt its spell strongly; he wondered if Miss Probyn did.

‘Come and sit in the bows again,’ he suggested, hoping for more talk. But Edina had gone to bed and her cousin dutifully went below, undressed, and crept into her bunk.

The three men remained on deck: Colin because he felt that he ought to, the Colonel because he was fascinated by the strange light, and the unwontedness of the whole performance. Julia having gone he sat in the cockpit with Reeder, while Colin stretched out on the deck, and snored.

'Do keep on talking,' the Skipper said, when their mutual flow of soldierly reminiscences had at last dried up. 'One gets so sleepy at the wheel—and one mustn't. I suppose you want to go into North Loch Roag?'

'Are there two?' The Colonel's office had failed to supply him with this piece of information—he felt rather foolish, but it was no good pretending.

'I'm aiming for Dun Carloway or Callernish,' he said carefully. 'Not sure of the exact spot, of course.'

'They're only a few miles apart, anyhow,' Reeder said, 'and both on North Loch Roag. Good—it's an excellent anchorage, and I believe there's a telephone. I must get a new stick as soon as possible.'

The Colonel faithfully kept on talking, while the red sunset band along the northern horizon gradually brightened and broadened into what would presently become a sunrise. But it was still in that curious half-darkness that they turned into Loch Roag, and Reeder, handing the wheel to Jamieson, went below and started the engine; they motored up the loch in a dead calm. Suddenly Reeder, again on deck, gave a sharp exclamation.

'Good God! What on earth is that?' He put the wheel over as a shadowy shape loomed up towards them; it was a large trawler, steaming down the loch without lights.

'Poachers in territorial waters, I expect,' the Colonel replied, remembering what the pleasant woman in the hotel at Rodel had said only the day before. 'Can you see her markings?' he asked.

'No, the light's still too faint. I'm always meaning to put a small searchlight on this boat. Why do you say poachers?—though I dare say you're right.'

Jamieson told him why.

'H'm. That might be pretty relevant for you.'

'So I think.'

Philip Reeder roused Colin to help while they cast anchor—it was 3.30 a.m., Summer Time.

'Any hurry for you?' the Skipper asked—'or can we get some sleep?'

'Oh, let us sleep by all means!' The Colonel realised that he had been up and about for eighteen hours on end; some of those hours extremely active, and all in a cool breeze. He was yawning as they went below to bed.

Chapter 4

EVERYONE slept so late that they passed up breakfast, and began the day with lunch at 12.30. Philip Reeder's main preoccupation was to get a new boom; this might conceivably be procured in Stornoway, the fishing port on the farther side of the island, and he, with Colin and Jamieson, rowed ashore to telephone about it the moment after lunch; Julia and Edina remained on board and did some washing.

'Here are some absolutely filthy socks in the Colonel's locker,' Julia announced, 'and a rather sordid shirt. Think he'd mind if we washed them?'

'I should think he'd absolutely love it if *you* did,' Edina said, with a quizzical glance at her cousin. 'You're always a fast worker, J., but this seems to be your quickest job so far.'

'Edina, if you've been using your eyes you may have noticed that *I* haven't been working at all,' Julia said, slightly ruffled. '*He* has, I grant you; but not me. You might be fair.'

'Yes. You haven't done much so far, and no one can help their face,' Edina said. 'All right, give them to me.' She plunged the Colonel's garments into a bowl of Lux and ammonia. 'I'll say I did them, too,' she added generously; 'now rinse this lot.'

When the men returned the whole yacht was festooned with clothes flapping in the breeze. 'Good,' Reeder said briefly. They had gone to the Shore Station of the lighthouse on the Flannan Islands, many miles out to sea, which possessed one of the few telephones at Carloway, and had spoken to Stornoway; there seemed a fair possibility of getting a new spar there. So after tea Reeder and Colin attacked the boom with a saw, and cut off the portions at each end to which the metal fittings were attached; then they lowered the rest of the useless broken thing overboard and towed it ashore at high tide, leaving it on the beach above highwater-mark—out of the way of boats, and a handy source of fuel for the islanders in that treeless place.

This performance took up most of the afternoon and evening. But the Colonel was fretting a little. He was thinking about how

he was to find what he had been sent to look for, and had gone ashore with the telephone party in the hopes of gossiping with the locals; in this he had failed—for the very simple reason that the Island of Lewis is Gaelic-speaking. The younger men and women have learned laboriously to speak English in the village schools; but the men were away catching herring, and the women busy gutting them in Stornoway; the *bodachs* and *cailleachs*, the old men and the old women, had no English at all—as for the children they fled, giggling, at the sight of a stranger, to peer at him from behind walls.

The indications he had been given were rather vague, too. 'Well it might be near a sort of tower or fort called Dun Carloway; more likely near a place called Callernish,' Captain Brown had said. 'Anyhow it may be somehow tied in with archaeology, to the extent that there's an old type who certainly goes digging, and we rather suspect that he may not only dig but plant things, if you follow me.'

'A Hun?' the Colonel had asked.

'No; unfortunately a British subject. Mind you we're not a bit sure; the idea has been raised, that's all.'

'Name?'

'Oddly enough we don't know it. We've got very little to go on but reports from rather ignorant country-folk. They call him "the English Professor".'

That was something; but slender enough, Jamieson thought gloomily. And then there was this business of the Russian trawlers. How was he to find out if the trawler they had met was Russian?

'You look bothered,' Julia said, as they sat on deck.

'I *am* bothered.' He told her about the trawler. And I can't think how I'm to find this hellish installation.'

'Oh, ask the locals! I still speak Gaelic after a fashion, and that always unlocks doors. I'll help. Tell me what you know.'

Jamieson gave her the few indications he had.

'Goodness, your people aren't much good, are they? Well, we must just try. Let's go ashore tomorrow—I know Edina wants to see Dun Carloway and Callernish—and to get milk, as usual. That will give an opening for a nice chat.'

Next morning Colin and Reeder set off early, taking the two metal-fitted ends of the boom with them; Julia rowed them

ashore to meet a car hired the previous day from a local resident. The Colonel stood watching the dinghy's progress towards a massive stone-built pier; to his surprise Miss Probyn turned the boat aside and landed her passengers on the rocks beyond it.

'Why is she doing that?' he asked.

'Oh, poor Lord Leverhulme! It's rather funny in a way.' Edina gave a low laugh. 'When he bought most of Lewis and Harris he was full of benevolent modern ideas: make proper roads, build bridges, build piers for the fishing-fleets to land at. The roads and bridges are all right, an excellent job; but the engineers who built his piers weren't seamen, and forgot about the tides, so a lot of them dry out at low water.'

'Yes, that is funny—and rather pathetic. Poor old chap.'

When Julia returned they all three went ashore to inspect Dun Carloway, and to get milk. They fell in almost at once with an immensely old lady, clothed in full black skirts, with a shawl over her head, leading a cow on a rope; with small unfenced fields everywhere, cattle could not be allowed to graze at will. Edina addressed her in English, but got no response; Julia tried her in Gaelic with much more success: the old woman said that if they returned in two or three hours the cow 'would have milk in her again', and she would fill their pannikin.

'You go off and look at the broch; I'll keep on with the job,' Julia said—causing the Colonel a slight twinge of conscience. And while the other two clambered all over that strange circular edifice, which rises to a height of thirty feet, she continued to talk with the old woman. No, she hadn't heard any boat in the bay; she slept well. But her son in the croft over yonder might know. Julia pursued the son—already more than middle-aged—and had a long 'crack' with him.

'That trawler you met was Russian,' she told the Colonel when he and Edina rejoined her.

'What trawler?' Mrs. Reeder asked in surprise.

'We were asleep—she was coming out, sailing without lights. Look, Colonel J., we must let Mrs. Reeder in on this; we shall get nowhere if we try to keep up a sort of phoney secrecy. It's she who got you to Erinish Beg, and really who's got you here. Will you tell her what goes on, or shall I?'

The Colonel thought he would, and did so.

'How very peculiar—and how horrible!' Mrs. Reeder said.

with sudden anger. 'These darling places! Yes—let's find everything, and get it all cleared out.' ✚

This attitude pleased the Colonel very much.

'Did you get anything on the Professor?' he asked Miss Probyn.

'Yes. He's digging away like mad, down near Callernish.'

'Could we go there?'

'Yes rather—I'm dying to see it,' Mrs. Reeder said. 'You know it was *the* pre-Christian holy place up here. You don't mind a bit of a walk, do you?' she asked. 'It's six or seven miles, and I think Philip has taken about the only available car.'

The Colonel didn't mind walking; Julia however asked where they would eat?—it was now half-past eleven.

'Sandwiches,' Mrs. Reeder said, tapping a small haversack slung over her shoulder. 'And tea at some croft, I expect.' They set off on their walk southward through the low flattish country, set with numerous small lakes full of water-lilies, towards the head of Loch Roag.

The traveller approaching Callernish by land sees first, on a slope of rising ground, a forest of slender upright stone slabs, profiled against the low horizon; but on closer inspection their arrangement becomes clear. A double avenue—in fact it is nearly thirty feet wide and a hundred yards long—leads up to a circle of stones about forty feet across, from which extend on both sides short arms; beyond the circle there projects a second avenue, also quite short, and narrower than the great avenue of approach.

This monument aroused great excitement in the Colonel. He took from his pocket a surveyor's measuring-tape in a round leather case, and measured and jotted down the width and length of the main avenue, and the diameter of the central circle; then he began on the short upper part. But while the man measured and wrote Julia, woman-like, had leapt to the essential conclusion, as had her cousin; presently they went up to Jamieson.

'Well, here's the origin of the Celtic Cross that we were wondering about on Canna the other day,' Julia said. 'Enormously long shaft, central boss, short side-arms, short top-shaft above the boss. It's complete.'

He stared at her.

'But this is pre-Christian, by many centuries.'

'Yes of course,' Edina said, with feminine impatience. 'But I told you before that this was the great holy-place for all this coast. When St. Columba settled in Iona to Christianise the Highlands he probably came and saw it; even if he didn't he will certainly have made it his business to learn about it, and its shape—and then adapted his own Christian symbol to come as close as possible to the earlier beliefs.'

'It's a fascinating theory,' Jamieson said. 'I wonder if it can be the answer.'

'But isn't it rather obvious?' Edina asked crisply. 'The early missionaries—so unlike the Baptists today!—always took the trouble to find out about the current local pagan religions, and then tied them in with the Christian faith. After all, why is Easter called Easter in England? It's *Pâques*, or *Pascua*, on the Continent.'

'I'm ashamed to say I don't know.'

'Because Eostre was the Anglo-Saxon Goddess of Spring. So St. Augustine of Canterbury, and his workers, were smart enough to give her name to the festival of the Resurrection. Spring is a sort of resurrection, after all, so it fitted quite well.'

'That is a nice piece of evidence for your theory,' the Colonel said temperately.

They ate their sandwiches down near the road; an old man came pottering along, and paused to speak to them.

'*Lar blar d'hiu*' (It's a warm day today) he said—to his evident pleasure Julia replied in his own tongue, and a long conversation in Gaelic ensued.

'Julia, ask him if there's a croft where we could get a cup of tea,' Edina said.

'Yes, and do ask him where the English Professor is digging,' the Colonel added.

'All in good time,' Julia replied easily, and continued to converse with the *bodach* in his incomprehensible lingo. At last—'His daughter will give us tea at his croft; it's just down the road,' she told them. 'And then he'll take us to where the digging is going on.' She began to laugh.

'He says the stones are full of evil powers. Years ago a great Professor from 'Caambridge' came up here and wished to spend a night among them; everyone begged him not to, because his soul would be in danger, and his life too.'

The croft where they were given tea was one of the old Lewis houses; of one storey, very long, with stone walls five feet thick; but the thatched roof abutted on the inner side of the walls, and was tied down with heather ropes fastened to large stones. Colonel Jamieson commented on this curious arrangement.

'Oh, the wind is the great enemy up here,' Edina told him. 'You've no conception of the force of the gales; a hundred miles an hour is commonplace. If the roof came down onto the outer edge of the wall the wind would get in under it and rip it off in no time; this way the wind hits the wall and is deflected upwards, so that it misses the bottom of the roof.'

The old man's daughter, with the untroubled courtesy of the Highlands, laid the table, boiled the kettle, and gave them a sumptuous tea—scones, butter, jam, and home-made cake; she urged boiled eggs on the party, but they declined these, since they had had lunch. The young woman was of the generation that spoke English, but she couldn't, she explained, get away to Stornoway for the herring-gutting because she couldn't leave Father. 'Twas a pity; the money was so good, and it was 'lively' to be in Stornoway for a while—she liked 'the pictures'.

Edina, brought up in the West Highlands, knew that even today it is in very poor taste to offer money for a meal, though now it is occasionally accepted—in the past it was always refused. On these yachting trips, therefore, she armed herself with a variety of gifts, and now drew out from her haversack a pretty coloured head-scarf for the mistress of the house, and a big red-and-white cotton handkerchief for the old man. The young woman fingered the scarf delightedly; the old man rattled away in Gaelic.

'My Father is saying, will he blow his nose on this, or put it round his neck?' she said laughing. Julia told him in Gaelic to use the thing for whichever he preferred, but not both at once!

'Ah, the young lady has the Gaelic? Isn't that wonderful, now? Is she Hielan' born?'

It was the daughter who eventually led them to where 'The English Professor' was digging, having snugged the old man down on a wooden settle by the fire. She tied the new kerchief over her head, and peered at herself in a small clouded mirror hanging on the wall beside the mantelpiece. 'It's lovely,' she said to Edina; 'ten thousand thanks.'

The 'dig' was out on a blunt promontory projecting westwards into the loch. There was no road, not even a track; they ploughed across soggy ground. On the way Julia, at the Colonel's instance (muttered in French) asked the young woman what The Professor was doing?

'Ah well'—their escort, displaying true Highland caution, paused, and obviously considered her words carefully.

'He says that he's digging up ancient things; this is an ancient place. But there are those that say he could be an enemy.'

'Why should they say that?' Julia enquired.

'Tis what is thought.'

Presently they came to the dig. A small mound had been trenched across, bisecting it in two directions, and in its centre an old white-haired gentleman was grubbing away very carefully with a trowel in the peaty soil round what appeared to be a *cist*, one of those box-like constructions of stone slabs which constitute minor Bronze-Age burial-places. At their approach he looked up, and Julia, when she saw his face, greeted him with delight.

'Professor Burbage! What fun!—how good to see you.' She ran forward and gave him a kiss. 'What have you got there?'

The old gentleman returned her kiss, but even as he did so he was looking at her companions. Rather to her surprise, instead of answering her question, he asked—'Who are your friends?'

'Oh, how stupid of me! Don't you know my cousin Edina Monro?—well she's Mrs. Reeder now. Edina, this is Professor Burbage, an old friend of Mrs. Hathaway's.' She paused—something in the tone of the Professor's question troubled her, coming on top of what the woman from the croft had just been saying—but old *Burbage*, whom she had known all her life! All the same—'And this is Mr. James, a friend of ours,' she said.

Both Edina and Colonel Jamieson were startled by this return to the Tobermory atmosphere, though neither gave any sign.

'Is this a cist?' Edina asked. 'I see the lid is still in position.'

'Ah, you know about cists?' He relaxed a little. 'Yes—so I hope it may be unrified.'

'What do you expect to find in it, if it is?' 'Mr. James' asked.

'Either a burial-urn, or one of those curious doubled-up skeletons, so common in Bronze-Age burials.'

Julia asked if they couldn't help? ~~4~~

'Well, you *could* take that second trowel and dig round the farther end. I want to get the sides clear before I prize off the lid.'

Julia knelt down and used the second trowel. This left the Colonel and Edina rather at a loose end, and they strolled away together; the woman from the croft, after polite farewells, had taken herself off. •

'Who's that man James?' the Professor asked, when the others had left them.

'Oh, a boy-friend of mine.'

'And what are you all doing up here?'

'Just cruising,' Julia said airily. She couldn't believe that the dear old Prof. was up to anything sinister, but his pertinacious questions were a little odd. 'We broke our boom two days ago off West Loch Tarbert,' she went on; 'Philip Reeder and Colin have gone to Stornoway today to see about getting a new one.'

'Colin? That's Edina's brother, surely?' Julia nodded. 'Isn't he in the Foreign Office, or something?' The old man put down his trowel as he spoke, and looked earnestly at her.

'Yes, Prof. darling—and not much good at it, if you ask me.' But something in his attitude troubled her more and more—why should he be so curious about what Colin was doing?

'And this James? What does *he* do?' Professor Burbage pursued.

'He was in the Army, I believe; now I think he's something in the City,' Julia lied recklessly, thoroughly disconcerted.

'My dear child, you ought to know more than that about the man you are going to marry,' the Professor said.

'I don't know that I *am* going to marry him; I only said that he's a boy-friend,' Julia said. 'Prof. dear, come on and dig, and leave my love-life alone!'

The old man laughed rather reluctantly, and took up his trowel again. But at intervals he kept raising his head and watching Edina and the Colonel's progress; when a fold in the ground hid them from his view—'Why did you come to Callernish?' he asked suddenly.

'Oh, Edina's been longing to see it for years. I wanted to, too—I expect you know Geoffrey Consett? He's always telling me how wonderful it is.'

'Ah yes—I think Mary told me that you knew Consett. A most intelligent young man.'

'Yes, he's another boy-friend,' Julia said cheerfully. 'Well rather an ex-one, now.'

'What precisely do you mean by that?'

'That I'm definitely not going to marry *him*. But Prof. darling, bother my boy-friends! I want to ask you about Callernish.'

'What about Callernish?'

'What relation it has to the extraordinary shape of Celtic Crosses.' She expanded on her newly-formed theory; this so interested Professor Burbage that for the moment he gave his whole attention to her. Yes, he had long thought that Callernish might have given its characteristic shape to the Christian symbol in the West Highlands; he in his turn expanded and expounded. Then they went on digging, more happily.

Meanwhile the Colonel and Edina wandered about, their main direction seawards. Really this was a hopeless proposition, Jamieson thought; you would want at least thirty men to quarter the ground for days to find what he was looking for. True, he had been given the Professor as an indication; but there was nothing to be seen in the immediate neighbourhood of the mound which the old man was excavating.

'Hullo!' Edina exclaimed suddenly. 'Look—there's another stone circle. One of those small ones where the stones hardly show.'

She was right. Half-buried in grass and heather, lumps of stone formed an unmistakeable circle; they trod out the perimeter, occasionally pulling away tufts of heather to reveal half-buried stones.

'We must tell old Burbage about this, if he hasn't seen it already,' Edina said.

'Oh no we mustn't,' Jamieson exclaimed—'not on any account.' He had walked out into the centre of the circle; there, half-concealed by the deep heather, was the all-too-familiar plastic cap or dome, just as he had seen it on Erinish Beg. He drew it carefully aside; below was the same metal cone, with the spiky saucer below it—he replaced the cap.

'What is this?' Edina asked, coming up to him.

'An installation for giving *exact* information on the course of satellites. May have been planted by a Russian trawler, like the one we met coming in, or by the Professor.'

'It *couldn't* be the Professor,' Edina protested. 'He's an old, old friend of Mrs. Hathaway's.'

Jamieson ignored her; he was stepping about, scanning the rough ground for the rest of what he expected to find. He found it all: the square of stamped-in turfs covering the long-life batteries—he knelt, prized up the turfs, and checked on this—and, after a further search, the little metal socket from which the small aerial would emerge to report back to Moscow. Of course, he explained to Edina, the satellite would send its own report; but this was an on-the-ground check, and therefore invaluable. ‘Your husband has a pretty good idea about it all,’ he added, with a faint grin.

‘Philip? Who told him?’

‘No one—he guessed. He’s very clever.’ The Colonel was thinking, ruefully, that at some point he would have to pay Philip Reeder five pounds.

He now took out a prismatic compass and a notebook, took bearings, and wrote them down.

‘Good,’ he said with satisfaction. ‘What a piece of luck. And how amusing to plant it in an Ancient Monument.’

‘But you can’t think that old Burbage did it? It’s incredible!’

‘Perhaps he didn’t. Someone did. And you heard what that nice woman who gave us tea said about his possibly being “an enemy”.’

Edina was very much upset.

‘He isn’t working here. There’s no sign of any excavation.’

‘Except the hole for the batteries, and that metal box with all the mechanism. But I agree—he looks too old and frail to have done that manual labour himself. I imagine teams have been sent ashore from the so-called Russian trawlers, at night, to instal the machinery.’

Edina looked relieved. The Colonel opened his mouth to say something else, which would have checked her relief; then he shut it again.

‘We’d better be getting back,’ he said. ‘If possible I should like to use that lighthouse telephone.’

‘To get on to London, and report this?’

‘Precisely. That, after all, is what your husband has so kindly brought me here for.’

Edina frowned, drawing her dark eyebrows together above her dead-white face.

‘You won’t talk about the dear old Professor?’

‘My dear Mrs. Reeder, the “dear old Professor” is already

under suspicion in London—as well as here, on the spot, as you heard for yourself. What I report will neither add to, nor subtract from, that suspicion; what I can also report is the Russian trawler which we met leaving the loch, without lights, two mornings ago.'

'Yes, that's something,' Mrs. Reeder said. 'All right—only do keep the Prof. out of it as much as you can. I'm positive he could never be mixed up in any sort of treachery.'

'I expect that's what the Macleans thought about their boy in the Foreign Office,' the Colonel said grimly, as they walked back towards the dig.

Julia and the Professor were still grubbing away; the cist was almost completely exposed now.

'Would you like me to help you off with the lid? It looks pretty heavy,' the Colonel asked politely.

'Oh, thank you very much—no. I can usually get some help locally when I need it.'

'Oh, I *wish* we could have seen the lid come off!' Julia said. 'Would there be jewellery?'

'Conceivably—not very likely,' the Professor replied. 'How are you getting back to Carloway? Have you a car?'

'No—on our flat feet. So we simply must go now,' Edina said firmly. They were all rather silent during this long trudge: Julia was dying to ask Jamieson whether he had found anything, but refrained. However she got her answer when Edina led them to the Shore-Station of the distant lighthouse; she took the Colonel in and introduced him.

'He wants to telephone,' she informed Julia when she came out.

'Then you *did* find it? How splendid! Where on earth was it?'

'In a very minor stone circle—we went to look at that, and there it all was. But J., it's rather horrid; he says that Professor Burbage is under suspicion in London.'

'All this local rubbish!' Julia said vigorously. 'You heard what that woman said.' But she did not feel the confidence which her words suggested. *Why* had the Professor seemed so suspicious, and asked all those questions about Colin and the Colonel? It was all rather disquieting—oddly enough she too thought of Burgess and Maclean, and the people who had loved and trusted them. One never knew, today, where treachery would strike.

In the Shore-Station the Colonel was again talking to Captain Brown in London.

'Yes, the complete outfit . . . I know, pretty quick; been lucky. No, *j'enverrai tout cela par le courrier*,' he said in French . . . 'Yes, compass-bearings . . . Yes, fairly near by . . . Only confirmation of what you already had . . . Quite; but I've also got something from another angle . . . Well I don't know where from; we've broken our boom, so we're rather lame; got to get round to have a new one fixed . . . No idea how soon . . . What about that other boat? . . . Oh, you have? Yes . . . Yes . . . Yes; well send me your stuff to *Poste Restante* Stornoway . . . All right, I'll ring when I can.'

When they got down to Lord Leverhulme's ill-placed quay the Stornoway party had just returned.

'No, there's nothing big enough here,' Philip reported to his wife. 'But I got on the telephone to Aberdeen and ordered one from there; and by the greatest piece of luck a boat is sailing north-about for Stornoway tomorrow, and will bring it. There's an excellent ship's carpenter here too—he's got our metal ends, and he will fix it for us.'

'When will it come?'

'Oh, two or three days. I think we'd better get round there as soon as we can, to be on hand. Let's get aboard and hear the weather report, and look at the tide-table; the tides are pretty strong round the Butt.'

The dinghy wouldn't really hold five large adults. Colin rowed the skipper and Edina out first; the skipper to listen to the wireless, Edina to start preparing supper. Julia and the Colonel waited, sitting dangling their legs over the side of the quay—he told her in detail about the discovery of the second installation. But Julia was worrying about what Edina had repeated about Professor Burbage being 'under suspicion' in London, and pressed Jamieson on this point.

'Well yes, my dear, he is.'

'It's nonsense! There can't be anything wrong with him. Just based on the local natter here, I suppose?'

He looked sadly at her.

'Not only on that, though that has come in.'

'Then on *what*, for goodness sake?' Julia demanded angrily.

'I can't tell you, at this stage. "They" have all sorts of hideous means of putting pressure on people.'

'I've known him all my life—I can't believe it,' Julia said. But

alas, there had been something odd about the Prof. this afternoon—and nowadays one could believe almost anything.

Reeder might have appeared to have forgotten why they had come to Loch Roag, in his preoccupation with getting a new boom; but he hadn't. After supper he once more invited the Colonel up on deck.

'Do any good?' he asked.

'Yes, we found it. Your wife noticed a rather obscure stone circle, and there it was, sitting in the middle of it! I'm most awfully grateful to you.'

'So you've done all you want to here?'

'Yes, thank you. I'm enormously obliged to you—you've been most good.'

'Want to get back to London?'

'Well, when I can. I'm expecting some mail at Stornoway.'

'Ah! Well if you can give us a hand round the Butt I shall be quite glad of it—Colin's not a great seaman.'

'Of course I shall be delighted to do that.'

'Good. We'll get off tomorrow; I've worked out the tides—it will mean another of these all-night trips, damn it. But one can't travel fast with a jury-rig. The weather report is good,' he added.

Chapter 5

TO get a big yacht round the Butt of Lewis on a try-sail is quite an undertaking, but Philip Reeder was experienced, and took such things in his stride. Unfortunately the weather forecast proved to be mistaken; well before the *Mary Hathaway*, creeping along under her jury-rig, came into the heavy tides round the northern point of the Long Island a strong wind blew up. This produced uncomfortable choppy seas, which increased in violence when the yacht encountered the ferocious tides—Edina, who was sometimes seriously seasick, took to her bunk with a basin, with Julia in attendance. Presently the girl opened the hatch and shouted to the Skipper.

‘Philip, where do you keep that anti-seasick stuff? I can’t find it, and I think she ought to have it.’

‘Can you take over for a couple of minutes?’ Reeder said to Jamieson, who was sitting with him in the cockpit. ‘Keep straight on this course till you pick up the lighthouse—but I shall be up again before then.’

Below he hunted in vain for the seasick remedy which they usually carried for Edina.

‘Must have forgotten it, I suppose,’ he said vexedly. ‘All right, my dear’—he held his wife’s damp forehead while she again retched, now fruitlessly, over the basin. But he was worried by her state; between the gulping spasms she leant back, quite exhausted, against the pillows.

‘Bring my brandy-flask—it’s in the locker under my bunk,’ he commanded Julia. She brought the flask and a small glass, and Edina took a little sip—which she instantly brought up again. Philip took the basin and emptied it in the lavatory opposite his bunk; in the narrow passage-way he called to Julia.

‘I think I must stay with her for a bit,’ he said in a low voice. ‘You’d better go up to that man; if he wants to ask any questions you can come down to me. The chart’s in the starboard locker and take up the Light’s List, so that you can check on the lighthouse—it’s on the table in the saloon. Don’t let it get wet! Put on

your oilskin; there's a lot of water coming on board.'

Julia took her oilskin off a hook in the companion-way where these dripping objects habitually hung, and tied her sou'wester over her head; then she went and collected the Admiralty List of Lights, stuffed it down the front of her jersey, and scrambled up the companion-ladder. She shut the hatch carefully behind her, and ran unsteadily aft along the wet deck, collapsing into the cockpit as the yacht gave a sudden lurch.

'Where's the Skipper?' Jamieson asked.

'Staying with his Missis--she's quite bad. He sent me up so that you'd have a messenger if you wanted one.'

'I shall have a nice companion, anyhow,' the Colonel said. 'But we may want the chart.'

'It's in the locker over there--and I've brought up the Light's List.'

The cockpit of a yacht at night is a curious microcosm, centred on the illuminated compass in front of the steersman--around is darkness or semi-darkness, and the noise of waters. To steer in heavy waves and tides it is necessary on old-fashioned boats to stand, holding the wheel behind one's back, watching the faintly-lit compass dial on the binnacle in front; it is most useful to have a second person with a torch to spread out the chart from time to time, let alone to consult the Light's List, which gives such indications as: 'Flashing alternate red and white, at intervals of seven seconds.' For studying the second-hand of one's watch to interpret these a torch is still more necessary, and Julia had forgotten hers; she went below again to fetch it.

'What's up?' Reeder asked.

'We want my torch for the chart.' She pulled the object out of her locker and stuffed it in the pocket of her oilskin.

'All O.K.?' Reeder asked a little anxiously.

'Yes, fine.' She bent over her cousin. 'My poor dear, how do you feel?'

'Ghastly,' Edina murmured. 'Your chum couldn't sink us, could he?' she asked with the grin of a grin.

'We'll try!' Julia said, reassured by the grin, and went on deck again.

In that small, dark, wet world of the yacht's cockpit she sat down, pulled out her torch, and then got the chart from the locker; in the strong wind it was difficult to keep it spread out,

and Jamieson took one hand from the wheel to help to hold it flat—his hand partly covered hers.

‘Now the torch.’ She turned it on the chart, and he peered over it at the binnacle.

‘Yes, dead on course. All we have to do is to pick up that light. Can you see anything?’

With the wind had come up clouds and rain, masking the red band that should have stretched along the northern horizon linking sunset with sunrise; it was very dark. Julia peered intently through the murk and the driving rain, forward and to starboard. ‘No—not a thing.’

‘Oh well—keep your eyes open. Do you like this night sailing?’

‘I’ve never done it before. Gosh!’ the girl exclaimed, as they shipped a big wave; water came pouring into the cockpit, and with it the halyards, which had been neatly piled in coils at the foot of the mast, were washed clean aft, right along the deck.

‘Are you wet?’ the man asked.

‘One’s always wet sailing,’ Julia replied cheerfully, rolling up the chart. But she didn’t replace it in the locker; she unfastened her oilskin, and stuffed it down the front of her jersey along with the Light’s List. ‘Locker’s probably got water in it now,’ she explained, sitting down again.

In the darkness, amid the rushing noise of the waves and the wind, a curiously close sympathy came into being between these two people, though they spoke very little. Jamieson admired the girl’s coolness and common-sense in a slightly tense, or at least anxious, situation; Julia liked his handling of the boat. Presently the squall cleared away eastwards, and the sunrise-red began to show again, encouragingly—with the rain gone, Julia could see a distant winking from the lighthouse; she took out the List and checked the flashes on her watch with the torch, aloud.

‘That’s it all right,’ Jamieson said. ‘Just give it plenty of clearance, and round we go.’

There were steep confused seas round the Butt of Lewis; at one point the Skipper came up to see that all was well with his precious boat, and then returned below—Edina was still being sick, he said. When he had gone both Julia and Jamieson were aware of a renewal of that closeness of feeling which his appearance had interrupted. But after they had rounded the point and were in the shelter of the island the sea quietened down; they

sailed along with a gentle favourable breeze. The light grew, spreading over sea and sky from that low horizon-band; the northern dawn, never far away in midsummer, was coming. They both had a happy sense of having triumphed together over difficulties—a very uniting feeling.

‘I think we ought to toast the sun when it does rise,’ Jamieson said. ‘Could you go down and get something?’

‘What?’

‘Whatever drink you can find in the lockers. Hell’s bells, we’ve been on deck all night!’

Julia, burbling her warm laugh, went below; when she reappeared the front of her blue jersey was bulging; she drew out of it two small glass mugs, a bottle of gin, and a bottle of Ver-mouth.

‘This do?’ she asked. ‘Philip must have hidden the whisky.’

‘Do *perfectly*. Take the wheel while I put out the lights, will you?’

Julia adored taking the wheel—it gives to almost any human being a wonderful sense of power to be in control of the motions of that vivid entity, a ship, large or small. The Colonel unhooked the lamps, blew them out, and stowed them in one of the cockpit lockers.

‘Philip keeps them in the fo’c’sle,’ she told him.

‘Yes—I’ll take them down later. We don’t want to disturb those poor sick miseries.’ While Julia laughed he filled the glass mugs; at the very moment when the round red ball of the sun appeared the horizon he handed Julia one of them, and took the other.

‘Here’s tae us! Wha’s like us? Damn few!’ he said, using the old Scottish toast.

‘I’ve never drunk a cocktail at 3 a.m. in the open air before,’ Julia said. ‘It’s a splendid notion.’

‘You’re rather in tune with splendour, aren’t you?’ Jamieson said.

‘Am I?’

‘Oh yes.’ He looked slightly embarrassed; Julia said nothing. On the surrounding waters, curled up like silver-and-black sofa-cushions, enormous birds floated, apparently fast asleep.

‘Goodness! Can those be gannets?’ she asked, pointing.

‘We’ll soon see.’ The Colonel was a little frightened at having

said so much, and was glad of the distraction. 'Could you take the wheel, and steer close to one of them?' '✓'

Julia did so, while the Colonel armed himself with the boat-hook, and went up and knelt in the bows. As the yacht passed close by one of the sofa-cushions he gave it a prod; a huge beak and head, with pale goose-grey eyes, drew out from under the plumage; the black-tipped wings were slowly unfolded, the great feet clawed at the water, and laboriously, clumsily, a gannet took to the air after its sea-borne sleep. 'I never knew they slept on the water,' the girl said.

'I imagine very few people have ever seen them doing it,' Jamieson answered.

About 5 a.m., off Stornoway harbour, they saw another thing unfamiliar to most people—trawlers racing in with their night's catch of herring to be first in the market. They shot round the big bulge in the land at tremendous speed, some literally with 'flames coming out of the top'.

Reeder had been so disgusted by the all-pervading stench of herring in Stornoway—it has to be smelt to be believed—that he had decided to anchor in Loch Erisort, some miles to the south; during his brief midnight appearance on deck he had ordained that he was to be 'knocked up' to take the yacht in, and at 7.30 a.m. they dropped anchor in a sweet sheltered place. Julia went down and made tea, of which she took a cup to her cousin.

'You sup that—I'll get the breakfast,' she said. 'Feeling better?'

'Yes—quite all right now. Once we got into calm water I slept like a log. You *are* lucky, never to be seasick.'

'Yes, aren't I?' Julia responded blithely.

After breakfast everyone went to bed and slept till two, when Edina produced lunch. Then they motored into Stornoway on the engine, to collect mail and enquire for news of the new boom. Julia could hardly be dragged to the Post Office, she was so fascinated by the scene on the quay, where scores of young women in white Wellington boots and rubber aprons stood gutting the shiny silvery fish with accomplished deftness and at lightning speed, tossing them into wooden barrels; every so often they flattened out the fish in the barrels and strewed coarse salt over the surface—then they went on slitting more herrings open. The smell was appalling; Philip became impatient.

'Do come on, Julia.'

'Where do the barrels go?' Julia asked, as they made for the Post Office.

'Used to be to Germany—I believe a lot go to Poland now.'

At the Post Office there was something for everyone. Colin fastened greedily on letters from his young wife Aglaia, Edina on one from her factor at Glentoran, giving news of the cows; Julia happily pocketed another in Mrs. Hathaway's familiar handwriting, and the Colonel took over a type-written envelope with a grunt of satisfaction. 'When does the next post go out?' he enquired of the girl at the counter.

'Tomorrow, with the steamer.'

For Philip there was a telegram from Aberdeen, informing him that the boat bringing his new boom was due some time the following day.

'I think I'd better go and see their agents about this,' he said. 'We don't want to stay in this stink a moment longer than we can help.'

'Where shall we meet, then?'

'Oh, at the hotel. You can have tea—I want to see that ship's carpenter.' He strode away.

The hotel suited all the others very well. The Colonel, in particular, wanted to write a report to his London office—since he had been on deck all night he had had no chance to do this. When tea came the party broke up, taking their cups with them to different parts of the room to write their letters. Jamieson had brought a block in his pocket, and before he even read his communication from London he wrote out an account of what he had found at Callernish, referring to his notebook for the compass-bearings which gave the exact position. Then he fetched a second cup of tea, returned to the table where he had been writing, and studied what London was able to tell him about the Swedish boat. 'Registered in Sweden, but the crew are believed to be English-speaking Russians,' he read. 'If you come across her again it might be useful if you could contact them and verify this.'

The whole of Stornoway in summer reeks of herring, it penetrated even into the hotel, it was in the Post Office when Julia and the Colonel walked back there together to post their letters—his to his office, hers to Mrs. Hathaway. The man took both to

put into the box, and saw the name on her envelope—he paused. ✂

‘Have you said anything to the old lady about our having met the Professor?’ he asked.

‘Yes. But not a word about his being under a cloud, nor how odd he was.’

‘Good. But in what way was he odd?’

‘I’d rather not tell you.’ As so often, Julia regretted her careless words. They stood together in the small street outside the Post Office, the man still holding the letters in his hand, and stared at one another, almost with hostility.

‘Nonsense, Julia—you’ve got to tell me. You’re in on this; you must see that you have a responsibility. What *was* odd about Burbage? Come on—cough it up.’

No man had ever spoken to Miss Probyn with such brusque authority before—and she was not insensible to his suddenly calling her Julia.

‘Come on,’ he repeated, as she hesitated.

‘Well—’ rather haltingly, she told Jamieson of the Professor’s pertinacious enquiries about him and Colin, and how these had disturbed her. ‘But of course he’s very old,’ she ended.

‘Oh dear! This doesn’t look too good,’ the Colonel said. The real sadness in his voice shook the girl more than anything else. He pushed the two letters into the box. As they walked back he told her what he had learned about the Swedish boat.

At the hotel they found Philip, triumphant because the boat with his new boom was reported by her agents as being certainly due in the following day. ‘So now let’s get out of this,’ he said.

Next day, once more on the engine, they returned to Stornoway to deal with the new boom. A large coaster lay at anchor in the harbour—‘Ah, she’s in. Good,’ Philip Reeder said. But while he was seeking a buoy to which to moor his yacht he spotted something else; Philip was very observant.

‘Julia!—come here. Isn’t that that Swedish boat that fouled us in the Sound of Mull, and then came down after us to the Erinish Islands? You wrote her number down.’

‘I’ll get it.’ Julia hurried below and fetched her engagement-diary.

‘Yes—here we are.’ She read: ‘Y.J.631.’ Those letters and numbers stared at them, large and white, from the motor-cruiser.

'Could we go alongside and see if anyone is on board?' Jamieson asked the skipper, in an undertone.

'Yes. Did you get anything on her yesterday?'

'Only a little—not to her credit!'

Philip steered the *Mary Hathaway* alongside the Swedish boat, and hailed her, 'Ship Ahoy!'—an international summons. There was no response.

'They must all be ashore,' Philip said, and continued his search for a mooring for his own yacht. They found one, and made fast.

'Now, who comes ashore?' Reeder asked.

'I don't,' his wife replied.

'Nor do I,' said Colin—he had by no means finished an enormous letter which he was inditing to his wife. Reeder, the Colonel, and Julia scrambled into the dinghy, and rowed off to the herring-stinking quay.

'How soon shall we meet you?—and where?' Jamieson asked his host; even Philip was struck by the Colonel's calm use of the word 'we'.

'Oh, at the hotel—in about an hour and a half; maybe a bit later.' He hurried off to confirm all his arrangements—Julia and Jamieson were left standing on the quay.

'Where do we go from here?' the girl asked.

'I should very much like to find the crew of that boat, the Y.J. whatever it is, and give them the once-over,' the Colonel replied.

'Oh, well let's potter about.'

But in Stornoway the three men in berets were not to be seen at all; tired of pottering, the couple went in to a rather small humble pub, and ordered drinks. 'Do your local stuff,' the Colonel muttered in Julia's ear.

Obediently, Julia asked in Gaelic of the landlord whether he had seen anything of three men in berets, off a motor-boat. The man saluted her knowledge of his native tongue with satisfaction, but gave the substance of his reply in his own form of English.

'Ach, those Rooshians! Yes, they were in here twice for drinks. Ah'm hearing they took Johnnie Macleod's hire-car to drive over to Callernish the day.'

Julia asked the landlord why he thought they were Russians.

'They were speaking together, and one or two lads was in here that had been to Rooshia with the Navy, when our ships put in

to some port; they knew a little of the language, and spoke to those three men in it.'

'And did they understand?'

'They did, right enough; but 'twas in English that they answered—and from then out they were speaking English, even to one another; rather middling English. Ah'm thinking they're spies of some sort,' the landlord said, and repeated what the woman at Rodel had said about poaching by Russian trawlers. 'Keeping an eye out for the patrol-boat, and letting the trawlers know—that is my notion,' the man said.

Julia had quite another notion; the idea that they should be driving to Callernish made her very unhappy. When the landlord turned away—'Got all you want?' she murmured to Jamieson.

'Yes—splendid. Let's go.'

Outside—'Ought we to follow them?' Julia asked unhappily.

'To Callernish? No, I hardly think so—there won't be time, and we should be showing our hand too much. But we might try a check at the garage—did he say *Johnnie* Macleod?' In the Long Island at least half the inhabitants are called Macleod.

They found Johnnie Macleod's establishment, which hardly amounted to a garage—he had exactly two ancient cars for hire. Julia made her usual easy contact in Gaelic, and established that three men had hired one of the cars to be driven to Callernish and back, that morning; Mr. Macleod also expressed the opinion that they were 'Rooshians'.

'My dear, I'm sorry about this for you,' the Colonel said, as they walked back to the hotel to meet Philip Reeder.

'We can't be *sure*,' Julia said, rather desperately.

'No. Let us cling to not being sure,' the man said. 'All the same, when we come in to have the boom fixed tomorrow I shall want you to ask Mr. Macleod's driver exactly what the "Rooshians" did at Callernish.'

'Ask him yourself! Why put this on me?' Julia asked sharply.

'You get better results. As to *why* all this has to be done, isn't it part of the defence of the free world?'

'Oh, don't be so pompous!' She turned away; he guessed that she was near to tears. He put an arm round her shoulder.

'My dear, I've already told you that I'm sorry about this.'

Julia blew her nose.

'Sorry about that,' she said then. 'I suppose you're right—if

this *can* be true. Very well—I'll help tomorrow.'

'Tomorrow' brought many activities, when the *Mary Hathaway* once more put in to Stornoway. The new boom was brought out on a launch, raised on the burton, and fixed in position; the mainsail was dragged up from the fo'c'sle and bent to the mast and the new boom; all those complicated lacings and mousings, which had been undone with such difficulty on the open ocean, were replaced much more comfortably in a calm harbour, with the help of the carpenter, who knew a lot about boats as well as carpentry. When the job was well under way Jamieson asked Reeder if he and Julia could have the dinghy to go ashore again for a short time.

'Do you really need Julia?' the Skipper asked; the girl was busily threading cords through brass rings in the foot of the mainsail, and lacing them round the shiny new boom.

'Yes,' the Colonel said rather abruptly. 'She can get more out of these people than I can.'

'Something about that Swedish boat?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, all right. But don't be too long. We want to get back in good time tonight, to make an early start tomorrow.'

'We'll be as quick as we can.'

'D'you want to row?' Julia asked Jamieson, as they stepped down into the small boat.

'No. You do it better—and I like watching you.'

Ashore they made their way to Johnnie Macleod's garage. Fortunately the proprietor's son, who had driven the three 'Rooshians' over to Callernish the previous day, was in; Julia had a long conversation with him. The Colonel stood by, unable to understand a word. He felt extraordinarily frustrated; it was maddening to be so wholly dependent on the account he would get from someone who—beautiful and shrewd as she might be—was not wholly on his side in this. But he was too intelligent to interfere; she could learn what he could not learn. At last, with many hand-shakings and *Oich-a-bhains* (Good-byes) all round, Julia walked out of the little yard; the Colonel followed her out to the small street.

'Well?'

'Oh do let's go and get a drink! I'm quite exhausted by all this counter-espionage!' the girl said rather bitterly.

'To the hotel?' he asked. He realised that whatever Julia had learned had upset her.

'I expect that's best. People might overhear one in that sweet little pub—though you owe them a lot!' she added pugnaciously.

'My dear, do calm down!' the man said gently. 'I know how hideous all this is for you. Come and have a drink, and take your time about telling me.'

In the hotel, over gins, Julia told him what she had learned. The three strangers had given the most cursory of glances at Callernish, and then had asked to be taken to where 'the famous English archæologist' was making his excavations. The driver, after enquiries, had driven them to the nearest point on the road to the dig. 'Of course they couldn't be driven to it; they got out, and walked down, and "stayed a fair while", and then walked back,' Julia said miserably.

'Did young Macleod *see* them talking to him? As far as I remember one can just see the dig from the road.'

'Yes, one can—and he did. "A very old man down there spoke with them for a while—and then they came back to the car".' She gave a gulping half-sob as she said this.

He put a hand on hers. 'Thank you for telling me. That was *all*?'

'Yes—bloody all!' Julia said angrily. 'Isn't it enough? You and your defence of the free world! I've done all I could for it, if the wretched thing is still worth defending:—strikes all the time for less work and more pay, no discipline, no sense of obligation—such as I have just been displaying! I suppose you'll have to report this?' she went on, after a pause.

'Obviously I must—though I shall make it clear that it's only a country-boy's statement, and at very long range. I think I'd better get a line off now—it should just make the steamer.'

'All right. I'll go out and wait by the dinghy.' In fact she couldn't bear to sit by and see Jamieson actually writing a letter that might be disastrous to beloved old Professor Burbage—a letter based on information that she had herself obtained. As she dawdled along the smelly quay she looked out across the harbour. The Y.J.631 was still there, but with no sign of life on board.

Distress or anxiety always made Julia want a drink, and at that moment she was extremely anxious and distressed. So although she had just had one gin, miserably, with Jamieson, she made her

way to the little pub. As she walked into the bar the first thing she saw was the three men in berets; the oldest stepped backward without looking, and bumped into her—his glass of beer splashed all over her sweater and trousers.

‘Do look where you’re going!’ the girl exclaimed crossly.

‘Oh, so very sorry. I am clumsy.’ He pulled out a handkerchief and began to wipe her clothes—Julia backed away; the landlord came round from behind the bar with a cloth and did the job.

‘Please, will you have a drink?’ the man said.

‘Oh no, though thank you so much. I always buy my own drinks. A gin and vermouth, please,’ she said to the landlord.

‘I wish you let me give you this,’ the elderly Russian said. ‘I think I see you before, in Tobermory.’

‘Oh did you?’ She remembered that Jamieson had wished to encounter the men on the motor-cruiser, and ‘give them the once-over’, and slightly relaxed her hostile attitude—she ought to make what use she could of this chance encounter.

‘Yes. You have a beautiful boat, the *Mary Hataway*—I notice her. But you break your boom, no?’

‘Yes.’ (How did he know that?)

‘How do you get your boat round here without a boom?’

‘On a try-sail.’

‘What is this, try-sail?’

‘A sail with no boom.’

‘You have a beautiful boat,’ the man repeated. ‘Where do you go next?’

‘I haven’t a clue,’ said Julia.

‘Please?’

At this so common and tedious expression of foreign non-comprehension, Julia became impatient.

‘Don’t you really know English? What nationality are you?’

‘Swedish.’

‘Oh—I thought all Swedes spoke English so well,’ the girl said coldly.

‘Some less well,’ the man replied, rather irritably.

Julia said ‘Good evening,’ finished her drink, and went out.

She reported this encounter to Jamieson when he rejoined her on the quay, after posting his letter to London.

‘What brass! What was his accent like?’

‘To me it sounded like the usual baddish Central-European—

I don't think I've ever spoken to a live Russian in my life.'

'I can't imagine why he should have tried this on,' the Colonel said thoughtfully.

'It began accidentally, of course, when he splashed his beer over me. That gave him his opening, and he may have thought I looked so dumb that he might as well try to find out all he could.'

'That might be it, of course,' Jamieson said—he was thinking so hard that he didn't realise the implication of his words—Julia grinned. 'Catching you alone like that may have made him take the risk,' he pursued. 'Why are you smiling?' he asked, suddenly noticing her face.

'Never mind. A private joke.'

But he spotted her private joke.

'Julia, I do apologise. I wasn't thinking.'

'Oh yes you were! Thinking about something else—that's why you said it. Anyhow I know I look dumb, and I don't mind in the least; it often comes in quite handy.'

'As it may have done this time.' He paused. 'I found a telegram at the Post Office,' he said. 'I must go back to London by tomorrow's steamer. If you could row me out I'll just pack my things, and perhaps you would bring me ashore again? I know Reeder won't want to spend a night here, so I booked a room in the hotel before I came down.'

'O.K.,' Julia said casually. She was rather dismayed at the degree to which her heart sank at this news. As she pulled across the harbour Jamieson took out his little notebook—his methodicalness was one of the things which she found so amusing and endearing. 'Could I have your address?' he asked. 'One that will always find you?'

Julia gave him the address of her Club in London.

'They forward from there without fail? I might need you at any time.'

'Without fail,' she assured him, wondering a little at his choice of words. Did he mean 'I might need your help'?

Everyone on the yacht expressed regret at the Colonel's departure.

'We couldn't take you down to Tobermory, or Oban?' Philip Reeder asked.

'No, Skipper, though thank you kindly—for that, and for all

the rest. This trip has been most valuable; I couldn't have done these jobs nearly so fast by any other means—and without my interpreter,' he said, with a smile at Julia.

When he had packed, and Colin had stowed his effects in the dinghy, Julia rowed him ashore again—Colin volunteered to do this, but his sister told him crisply that she needed him to peel potatoes for supper.

'Do let them say Goodbye in peace, you dope,' Edina said, as they went below.

'Oh Lord! Don't tell me she's starting something up with Jamieson,' Colin said gloomily. 'I don't want *all* my bosses moping over Julia. Torrens was bad enough.'

'I expect all the uncommitted ones she ever meets will mope over her,' Edina said, cheerfully.

'She oughtn't to let them,' Colin said, rolling up his sleeves and addressing himself to a bowl of potatoes.

'She can't help it. And as long as she's so useful to them, I expect moping over Julia will be an occupational hazard in the Secret Service.'

In the dinghy—'Where are you going now?' Jamieson asked.

'To Loch Erisort tonight, I suppose. After that back to Glen-toran, gradually—Philip never likes to be away from the farm for very long.'

'Well do look out for yourself,' he said seriously. 'If you see those three types again anywhere, avoid them. If that boat is in any harbour, don't go ashore alone. Will you promise me that?'

She was startled by his tone.

'Why, do you think they're murderous?'

'*All* Russians are murderous! No really, Julia—I mean this. Will you promise?'

'Yes, I promise.'

But she had a question she wanted to put to him; she slackened her rowing while she did so.

'Colonel Jamieson——'

He interrupted her. 'Must you call me that? Can't you use my Christian name?'

'I might if I knew it, but I don't,' Julia said, with her irrepressible giggle.

'My name is Philip.'

'Then why do they call you Jimmie?'

'How do you know that?'

'Colin told me—when I took the trouble to ask him your Christian name!'

'When did you ask him?'

'I shan't tell you! Anyhow I did. Well now, *Philip*'—but her expression changed as she spoke; the question she wanted to ask was far removed from the gaiety of this brief exchange. She hesitated.

'Well what, Julia?'

'After we get back to Glentoran I shall be going to London and I shall be seeing darling Mrs. Hathaway.'

'Oh, such a remarkable person.'

'Yes. But the dear old Prof. had been a sort of long-range worshipper of hers for years and years.'

'Well?'

'What I was wondering was whether I might give her some inkling of all this beastly trouble? It will be a fearful shock if anything comes on her out of the blue.'

'Have you any idea how long Mrs. Hathaway has known him?'

'Oh, fifty years at least, at a guess—I don't know for certain.'

'Known him really well? Has had his confidence?'

'Most people who know Mrs. H. give her *all* their confidence!—so I expect he has.' Suddenly the girl looked sharply and suspiciously at Jamieson; she stopped rowing altogether. 'But if you think I'm going to pump her about him for you, you're greatly mistaken,' she added coldly.

'That was not my idea at all,' the Colonel said. 'I was thinking that if she has known old Burbage so well, for so long, she might be a valuable witness for the defence, if it came to that; she might be aware of all sorts of extenuating circumstances.'

'Those wouldn't be needed, if his treachery can't be proved,' Julia said rather sharply.

'Quite so.' He paused, reflecting. 'Look, I will go as far as this. Please listen carefully, and remember what I say. You may tell your old friend that you met him, digging away—and you may also tell her of the *local* suspicions about him.'

'And the trawler and so on?'

'Yes, you could mention that—but not what it is all about.'

'Nor that he is under suspicion in London?'

'Not at this stage. It would only complicate matters. But if she

were to open up, as very likely she might to you, you might refer her to me. I'm in the Telephone Book—a Flaxman number.'

Julia looked, and felt, very unhappy. She began to row again. 'How *beastly* all this is,' she said, pulling at the oars.

'My dear, the modern world is very beastly. Are you quite clear as to what you may, and may not, say?'

'Yes, perfectly. I won't forget.' She rowed in to the quay; the Colonel humped his effects ashore, and stood looking down at her.

'Aren't you coming up?'

'I think I won't. Philip will be hotching to get away.' That was not her real reason. 'Goodbye,' she said.

'*Au revoir*—I hope very soon,' Jamieson said. He stood for some time watching the easy movements of her body as she rowed back to the yacht. •

Chapter 6

THE *Mary Hathaway* made a leisurely return to Glentoran. They headed for Lochmaddy in North Uist—Edina wanted to get some tweed from a particular old woman there. Having secured her tweed she suggested that they should put in to Inch-Ian again—‘She’s fun, and he loves seeing people, poor old boy.’

‘Too long a run for one day,’ her husband said.

‘Then let’s go to Canna again, and ring them from there. I should like a bath!’

Getting baths is one of the major preoccupations when sailing. Edina knew that the supply of hot water at the MacIans was inexhaustible, and she hadn’t had a hot bath for ten days. So to Inch-Ian they went, and, after baths for four people, ate one of Lady MacIan’s splendid meals.

In the West Highlands the grape-vine is an exceptionally well-grown plant. Julia, talking kindly to the deaf old Laird, but keeping her ears pricked for the rest of the conversation in the big drawing-room, was hardly surprised to hear Lady MacIan saying to Philip—‘Who was the *very* good-looking man you took on board at Tobermory, after poor Captain Benson left you? What a shame he was so seasick!’

‘He was much more use than Benson,’ Philip Reeder said bluntly. ‘He’s crewed several times in the Fastnet race. We should have been badly off without him going round the Butt on a jury-rig—that wretched woman my wife collapsed completely, and I had to nurse her.’

‘My poor Edina! What was wrong with you?’

‘Captain Benson’s complaint,’ Edina said, with a bleak little grin.

‘It takes her pretty badly sometimes,’ Reeder continued. ‘I was almighty glad to have someone competent to hand over to.’

Julia listened to this with all her ears. Was Philip withholding the Colonel’s name on purpose? And would he get away with it? Lady MacIan was a strong-minded woman, with the persistent curiosity of people who lead isolated lives in lonely places; she

wouldn't be satisfied, the girl guessed, till she had the name.

She was right.

'But you still haven't told me who this competent helmsman was,' their hostess said to Philip.

'Oh, one of Julia's innumerable boy-friends! He was in Tobermory, and we picked him up and took him along.'

Over to me!—Julia thought. Again she was right; Lady MacIan came across and asked her husband if he would have some more coffee? While she was fetching back his refilled cup Julia just had time to decide how to answer the question that she saw was coming. Lady MacIan would have picked this up in Tobermory, so the reply was plain.

'And *who* is your handsome admirer, Julia?' Lady MacIan asked, settling her husband's cushion in place behind his back.

'He's a Mr. James,' Julia said. She avoided looking at her companions. 'In fact Philip exaggerates a little—he's only a semi-boy-friend.'

'My dear, what strange *nuances* you all go in for nowadays. "A semi-boy-friend"! I wish I knew what that means.'

'In Vienna they would call it a *Verehrer*, who has neither got his *congé*, nor been accepted,' Colin put in, coming unexpectedly to Julia's help.

Lady MacIan turned to the young man in rather vexed astonishment.

'What on earth do you know about Vienna, Colin?' she asked, startled. She had an instinctive feeling that there was some kind of conspiracy among her guests to thwart her interest in Julia's new young man.

'Lived there in a family to learn the language—learnt the language, and quite a bit about the local *mores*,' Colin replied, grinning.

Lady MacIan gave up Mr. James as a bad job, and changed the subject. The broken boom, the subsequent delay in Loch Roag, and the visit to Callernish had all been dealt with exhaustively during luncheon—now she asked whether they had seen Professor Burbage when they were at Callernish? 'I hear he's doing some excavations near there.'

There was a pause—then Edina hurried in with a reply; poor Julia was intermittently listening to old Sir Ian, and shouting back at him.

'Yes, he was unearthing a lovely cist just when we were there. The lid was still on, so he hoped there would be something in it.'

'And was there?'

'I don't know. We shall hear in time, of course.'

'Such an interesting man,' said Lady MacIan. 'He came over here several times when he was examining those old forts on the Erinishes.'

All the yacht's crew pricked up their ears at this piece of information, but none of them said anything.

'He has worked so widely,' Lady MacIan pursued. 'Those excavations in Central Asia must have been fascinating—and he said the Russians were so helpful, and so enthusiastic.'

This time Julia, abandoning the poor old laird, came in with a response—they couldn't have silence every time Professor Burbage was referred to.

'What did he find there, Lady MacIan? Paintings, like Aurel Stein?—or just temples engulfed by sand?'

'Oh my dear, I'm not sure *what* he found—but he said it was very important.'

'How splendid!' Julia responded, with an enthusiasm which she was far from feeling.

They slept on board at Inch-Ian, and next day sailed southwards; they spent one night in a charming little anchorage below Oban; another day's sailing saw them back at Glentoran. This was a place that Julia loved; all through her childhood and youth it had been a second home to her; there she had learned such Gaelic as she knew from the keepers and the old boatmen. She had planned to spend at least a fortnight there after the cruise ended. But now she was in such a fidget about the Professor—a fidget greatly augmented by Lady MacIan's report that he had been on the Erinish Islands as well as at Callernish—that after a bare couple of days she said to her cousin, 'I think I must go back, Edina.'

'To see Mrs. H. about the Prof.? *May* you talk to her about him?'

'Up to a point. I have my sailing orders!' Julia said, with a rather cheerless grin.

'Oh, you take orders from him now, do you?' Edina asked caustically.

'In just the same way as Colin does, and in the same connection,' Julia replied, with a certain irritation.

'I can't think why you don't make them give you a salary, like they do Colin,' her cousin said coolly. 'I'm sure you're quite as useful to them as he is—probably more.'

'I don't need money.'

'Colin doesn't need it either, since you rescued his Aglaia's fortune in Switzerland,' Edina replied airily. 'She must be a multi-millionairess! Isn't it extraordinary?—in the old days at Glentoran we were all such paupers, there wasn't a penny for anything; and now Philip has oodles of money which he pours out on the place, and Colin is rich beyond the dreams.'

'Well I'm very glad for darling Glentoran,' Julia said. 'But I think I'd better go to London.'

Two days later Julia was back in her comfortable Chelsea flat; she had told the garage to send her car round. Drinking coffee after dinner, she rang up Mrs. Hathaway.

'Mrs. H.? It's me. Are you sleepy, or may I come round?'

'When did you get back?'

'This afternoon. Might I come along? Say if it's too late.'

'No. I'm longing to hear everything. And a kind acquaintance has just presented me with a bottle of rather superlative brandy.'

Mrs. Hathaway's flat was in Mayfair, most conveniently adjacent to a mews in which the wise old lady, by kindness and judicious tipping, had arranged that her friends could leave their cars—Julia ran her Dauphine in there, and was borne up in the lift to her godmother's flat. On the way she had given some thought as to how to approach the subject of the Professor, and had decided more or less to let the scene play itself, apart from mentioning the meeting at Callernish; Mrs. Hathaway was far too astute to be 'hooked' in any way—and besides, she loved her too much to try on anything of that sort.

The old lady began by asking her own questions. 'How is poor Ellen?' was the first. (Poor Ellen was Edina's Mother, old Mrs. Monro.)

'Quite fit, I thought; full of the usual grumbles, of course.' Mrs. Hathaway laughed.

'Well now, I got your first letter telling me about seeing the MacIans, and that you'd gone on to Tobermory—you interrupted it when you broke your boom. My dear child, what a performance, out in the open Atlantic!'

'Yes, it was quite exciting. And then we went round to

Stornoway on a try-sail; we sailed all night; it was rather lovely,' the girl said. She was wondering when to mention Jamieson; it would be no good trying to conceal his presence altogether. She decided to leave that.

'And in your second letter you told me that you had seen the Professor at Callernish,' Mrs. Hathaway pursued.

'Yes; he was just unearthing a cist, with the lid still on. Have you heard if he found anything in it?'

'Oh yes indeed. He found a doubled-up skeleton, just what he hoped for, and two splendid beakers, and quantities of those melon-shaped beads, blue and yellow.'

'I *wish* we'd seen that,' Julia said, with genuine regret. Her old friend looked rather keenly at her.

'He said you and Edina had a man with you, very good-looking, whom you were as good as engaged to,' Mrs. Hathaway said. 'Might one be told about this fortunate individual?'

'Even the beloved Prof. can be a bit of a clot sometimes,' Julia said, in a rather chilly voice—here they were at it, as far as the Colonel was concerned. 'I *told* the Prof. he was only a boy-friend, and rather on appro at that.' She was playing for time, and thinking hard while she did so. Should she tell Mrs. Hathaway the truth now, or go on stalling?

'My dear child, you know I never want to force your confidence,' Mrs. Hathaway said. 'Of course don't tell me anything you don't wish to. But Professor Burbage said that this Mr. James was something in the City, and that didn't sound quite like you, somehow. I should hate you to make another mistake.'

The last words rather broke Julia. Mrs. Hathaway had been an unhappy witness of the one appalling mistake which Julia had made about her young men, when she gave most of her heart, out in Switzerland, to a man who had merely played with her—she had never forgotten her godmother's supporting wisdom and consolation then. She decided to come clean at once.

'His name isn't James, and he isn't in the City,' she said. 'He's someone you know, and I believe rather like. The "Mr. James" and City part was just lies for the Prof.'s benefit.' She watched her old friend's face carefully as she said this.

To her dismay Mrs. Hathaway's expression changed in an indefinable manner—suddenly she looked very old. She paused perceptibly before she spoke.

'And why did you want to lie to the Professor?' Her voice was rather cold. Julia also hesitated—at last she said:

'Mrs. H., dearest, this is all utter misery. But obviously we've got to have it out. If you will tell me about the Prof.'s Russian digs, I'll tell you why I lied to him.'

Mrs. Hathaway's splendid face looked older than ever; quite ravaged, suddenly.

'How do you know that he ever did excavations in Russia?' she asked.

'Lady MacIan told us—I suppose he told her. I can't think why I never heard about it before. He never published anything, did he?'

'No.' The old lady paused. 'There were—difficulties—later,' she said. 'Oh, one should never trust the Russians!' she exclaimed with sudden vehemence. 'But he is so innocent—anyone can fool him, if they profess an interest in archaeology.'

Julia was silent. At last—'How wretched,' she brought out sadly.

'Unspeakably wretched. Living in torment for twenty-five years!' Mrs. Hathaway said, still vehemently. Then, almost visibly, she took a pull on herself.

'You promised to tell me why you lied to Professor Burbage,' she said measuredly. 'Was it because of his Russian excavations?'

'No—we hadn't heard about them when we met him; Lady MacIan only mentioned them when we put in to Inch-Ian the second time, on our way back from Stornoway to Glentoran.'

'Then *why*?'

Julia spoke carefully, remembering what the Colonel had said she might and might not say—oh, how hateful it was to have to be careful, talking to precious Mrs. H.!

'The locals were suspicious of him—really in a rather nasty way,' she said slowly. 'You know the Lewes is Gaelic-speaking, and of course I nattered with them in what's left of my Gaelic.' She watched Mrs. Hathaway's face carefully as she went on. 'They said they thought he might be "an enemy".'

'That seems a very poor excuse for lying,' Mrs. Hathaway said—'just local gossip. And now may I know who the handsome "Mr. James" really is?'

'Yes. Colonel Jamieson.'

Mrs. Hathaway began to look old again—old, and a little frightened. /

‘How came Philip Jamieson to be on your cruise?’ the old lady asked rather sharply. *

‘We met him in Tobermory, and took him along—Captain Benson had been so sea-sick that he decided to go home,’ Julia said, not too happily. ‘Philip was delighted to have him, because he’s done so much ocean racing.’

‘And what was Philip—I mean Philip Jamieson—doing in Tobermory?’

‘Buying tweed in Robertson’s shop, when we ran into him,’ Julia said, with an attempt at lightness.

The old lady looked keenly at the girl.

‘Julia, are you being completely frank with me? I know Colin was on the yacht—had he anything to do with Colonel Jamieson’s joining you?’

It was hopeless to try to delude Mrs. Hathaway—Julia had known that for years.

‘Yes, Colin had something to do with it—but what, and *why*, I’m simply not going to tell you,’ the girl said. ‘I hate not being able to, dearest Mrs. H., but there it is.’ She paused. ‘What I can tell you is that we hadn’t even met the Prof. when Jamieson came up and joined us. And the boy-friend act was simply put on for the Skipper’s benefit,’ she added, rather unwisely.

‘Oh, so it is just an act? Well, he would be much more appropriate for you than a Mr. James in the City,’ Mrs. Hathaway said smiling. She rose rather slowly and carefully to her feet, as the old do, and went over to a tray on a table.

‘You haven’t had any brandy,’ she said, half-filling a delicate tulip-glass and handing it to her guest. ‘*He* sent me this the other day.’

‘Oh thank you. Do you see much of him?’ Julia asked, with genuine curiosity.

‘A certain amount. I like him,’ the old lady said, putting her own glass down on a small table before, again carefully, she re-seated herself. ‘But I haven’t seen him since your trip—he just sent the brandy. A bribe, I expect,’ she added, with a fine smile.

The smile relieved Julia.

‘I wish he’d bribe me like this,’ she said—‘it’s wonderful, Mrs. H.’

'Ah, I daresay he will. It's curious how most of your flames are so knowledgeable about food and drink—except poor Geoffrey,' she added.

'Geoffrey doesn't know what he's eating,' Julia agreed. 'But I am grateful to him for putting me on to Callernish.' She described the circle and the avenue, and went into the question of West Highland crosses, and the possible connection between their shape and the great prehistoric monument. Mrs. Hathaway was interested in this.

'Did you ask Professor Burbage about it?' she asked.

'Oh yes, of course. He thought it probably was the reason.' How blessed it was to be talking about the Professor purely in connection with archaeology, the girl thought. But when she rose to go, the shadow which now hung between them concerning Burbage rose up again.

'Shall you be seeing Colonel Jamieson?' Mrs. Hathaway asked.

'Not that I know of. He did go so far as to ask for my address, and I gave him the Club.'

'Ah well, I expect he will follow you up,' the old lady said, with a rather half-hearted smile. 'Bless you, my dear child.' She asked for no assurances, and Julia offered none.

The Colonel did follow Julia up. The following morning there was a telephone call from her Club. 'Miss Probyn? A letter has just been delivered for you by hand, marked *Very Urgent*. What would you like us to do with it? Is there any chance of your looking in today?'

Julia collected the letter; she read it in a big room with chintzy armchairs. 'I told you I might need you,' he wrote, 'And I think I do. When can we meet, and where? The sooner the better—could you telephone? You know the number.'

Julia's Club possessed antique and therefore completely sound-proof telephone-boxes; she rang up from there—in the flat Mrs. Titmuss could overhear everything. Through to Colin's familiar office-number—'Colonel Jamieson, please,' she said.

The usual adenoidal teenage voice said, 'Just one moment, please,' and Julia was promptly put through to a different voice which said, in reply to her request—'I'm not absolutely sure if he's in. Was he expecting you to ring him up?'

'Yes; he sent me a note by hand this morning, asking me to

ring him up urgently. My name is Miss Probyn.'

'Oh yes,' said the voice. 'Will you excuse me while I find out?'

Julia had not realised that the British Intelligence Service normally provides people of Jamieson's seniority with these charming and high-powered secretaries—she was agreeably surprised. A moment later—with a little knock of pleasure at the sound of his voice—she heard Jamieson say:

'Hullo, my dear. How good of you to ring up at once. Now, where can I see you?'

'Well I'm free at drinks-time this evening.'

'Where?'

'What about my Club?'

'A little public, perhaps,' the man said.

'Then come to my flat.' She gave him the address. 'What time? Six-thirty? All right. How did you know I was back?' she added.

'I didn't know. I guessed you would be.' He rang off.

'What a nice place this is,' Colonel Jamieson said that evening, strolling to the windows of Julia's drawing-room, which looked out onto the gardens of Chelsea Hospital, green and spacious, with the river beyond.

'Yes.' But she was still in a fret about the Professor and Mrs. Hathaway. 'What did you want to see me about?' she asked, rather nervously; she had been upset by his guess that she would have returned so soon.

His answer surprised her.

'Have you any friends in Ireland? That's the next place on the order-paper.'

'What part of Ireland?'

'The County Mayo—possibly the County Clare too.'

'I can't do much about Clare. I know several people in Mayo, though. Where is your new suspect spot?'

'Probably on Clare Island.'

'Oh, such a sweet place!' the girl exclaimed.

'Well, will you go on helping me?' Jamieson asked. 'You see it would be very desirable that I should go out there as a friend of somebody's, and of course draw on your local knowledge. You know the island itself?'

'Yes, backwards. The O'Haras live almost opposite to it, and we go over now and again in their motor-launch.' Julia was so relieved that he didn't seem to want to catechise her about Mrs.

Hathaway that she felt quite gay—and it was extraordinarily delightful to be with him again.

‘Well, when do you want to go? It will take a few days to organise, of course,’ she said.

‘Do you think you could get something settled for the latter part of next week?’

Julia considered.

‘Today’s Thursday, and we’ve missed tonight’s post, so they won’t get my letter till Monday. Let me think.’

‘I can get your letter in to catch tonight’s post, if you write it while I’m here.’

‘How? Oh well, I suppose you can have it flown by a special plane to Collinstown!’ She laughed and paused, still thinking. Then—‘Don’t let’s rush this,’ Julia said. ‘We’ve got to plan it out properly from the start. What’s your cover-story to be?’

‘Archaeology?’

‘There’s not a lot of that on Clare Island; the principal things are post-mediaeval. What about birds? Fulmars started nesting there a few years ago.’

‘I’m better at archaeology than birds,’ the Colonel said.

‘Oh well, you’ll have to do some home-work! Get James Fisher’s book and mug up Fulmars.’

‘Title?’

‘I can’t remember. Go to the London Library, and just ask for Fisher on Fulmars.’

The Colonel took out his little notebook and jotted this down, while Julia went on thinking about how to arrange this expedition.

‘I don’t think I shall ask Lady Helen to put you up at Ros-trunk,’ she said. ‘That would be over-stressing things. You’d better stay at the Oldport Hotel—it’s quite good, and only about six miles away. Then you can flip to and fro in your hire-car.’

‘Where shall I get a hire-car?’

‘Oh, from Shamus Moran in Oldport—such a charmer!’

The Colonel digested all this. It was clear to him that Julia was extremely well-informed on this fresh *locale*—which was very lucky for him. But he had one or two questions to ask.

‘Does booking a room at Oldport mean a second letter?’ he asked, glancing at his watch.

‘Oh no—Helen will do that.’ Julia went over to her walnut

escritoire, took out a sheet of writing-paper, and began to scrawl on it in her big clear hand.

'Who is Lady Helen?' Jamieson asked.

'Michael O'Hara's wife—she was a Glamorgan,' Julia replied, scribbling away. 'She's an R.C., so she gets on marvellously with the locals.' She put down her pen, and turned to her guest. 'If you're going to Ireland, you might as well realise the source of its tragedy,' she said. 'In all other European countries the landed gentry have acted as a sort of lever, to raise the standards of living among the country population. But not in Ireland. There "the Ascendancy", the landlords, are English and Protestant, alien in race and faith; so the locals just won't listen to them. That's why rural Ireland is the way it is.'

Philip Jamieson was surprised by her words, and by the energy with which she uttered them.

'You seem to care about the place,' he said. 'Why?'

'Oh, Helen O'Hara is a remotish cousin, and I've been dodging over there for years. It's not at all the same thing as Glentoran, which is really home to me; but I do enjoy Mayo madly—everything is such fun.'

'And will "the locals" take anything from your cousin?'

'Oh yes, everything! You see the O'Haras aren't Ascendancy at all; they're "the old lot", the indigenous aristocracy, so their position is still recognised by everyone. Elizabethan creations like Lord Oldport are regarded even today, after more than three centuries, as "in-comers".'

'How enchanting! I do look forward to seeing this set-up under your auspices.'

'Good. But now let me write,' Julia said, turning back to her desk.

'May I use your telephone?'

'Of course.' She wrote away, concentrated on what she was saying to Lady Helen, while the Colonel telephoned. When she had closed and stamped her letter she held it out to him. 'There you are.'

'Thank you very much.' But he made no move to leave. 'A messenger will be here to collect this at any moment,' he said. 'I wondered if you would dine with me?'

It was Julia's factotum's evening off, and rather than poach herself a couple of eggs, she accepted this invitation. 'So long as

it's not one of those smart crowded places. I can't bear having my hat knocked into my soup by a waiter behind me.'

Jamieson laughed.

'I know the place you mean. No, not there. Have you a preference?'

'There's lots of room in the Ritz Grill, and the food is good.' She was also thinking that one almost never met anyone one knew in that spacious place; the horrible people who wanted to be seen dined upstairs.

'Excellent! May I telephone again and book a table?'

While he was doing this the front-door bell rang—Julia went to it.

'For the Colonel's letter,' said a small man in a brown trilby hat.

'Oh yes—just a moment.' She went back into the drawing-room, where her letter to Lady Helen still lay on the arm of Jamieson's chair—she took it out.

'I ought to see the Colonel,' the man in the trilby hat said.

'The Colonel's on the telephone.'

'I'd better see him,' the little man persisted. She went back into the drawing-room; Jamieson had now finished his call.

'Your little type won't take the letter without seeing you.'

'All right—he went to the door.'

'I must change,' Julia said as he returned to the drawing-room.

'You look perfect.'

'Nonsense! Eight minutes—give yourself a drink.'

In exactly seven minutes the girl reappeared.

'Do you mind if we go by taxi? It's impossible to park anywhere near the Ritz,' Jamieson asked.

'Not a bit. I'll ring for one.'

'I have—in fact he's there,' the Colonel said, looking out of the window.

Over dinner in the spacious calm of the Ritz Grill—'How have you explained me to the O'Haras?' the Colonel asked.

'Oh, the same old boy-friend-on-appro act,' the girl said, a faint hint of one of her becoming apricot blushes appearing on her cheeks. 'Plus a terrific interest in Fulmars—hence Clare Island.'

The Colonel smiled rather wryly at this assessment of his position. Few men who are falling in love really care to be

described as a 'boy-friend-on-appro'.

'I told her to book you in at the Oldport Hotel for next Thursday, and to tell Shamus to lay on a hire-car for you for as long as you wanted it,' Julia added. 'She's to telegraph me if everything is all right. Of course it's the height of the fishing season, but Dickie Bowden-Brown will do anything for Helen. I said Shamus was to meet us with your car at Martinstown.'

'What and where is Martinstown?'

'Oh, the railhead from Dublin—fifteen miles away. Shamus can take me on, and then drop the car back at the hotel for you.'

'That sounds all excellent,' Jamieson said.

'I'll ring you when I get her wire,' Julia added.

'Why doesn't she use the telephone?'

'Six-and-eightpence for three minutes, and four hours delay? Not on your life,' Julia responded briskly. 'I must warn you that Oldport isn't "on the air" after 10 p.m., or before 8 a.m. Mayo is in the wilds still—the O'Haras had to lay on two miles of line to be on the telephone at all—it cost them twelve hundred pounds.'

'Good Lord!' the Colonel exclaimed.

'Oh yes—the Outer Islands are positively metropolitan compared to the west of Ireland,' the girl said cheerfully. 'You go back fifty or sixty years when you set foot in the County Mayo. "Mayo, God help us!" the people call it themselves.'

A fresh dish appeared; they discussed it. 'I'm glad you care about food,' Jamieson said, after some rather discriminating comments from Julia.

'Why?'

'Because I care about it too.' He left it at that, and rather hastily put the question that Julia had been dreading all the evening. 'Have you seen Mrs. Hathaway?'

'Yes, I saw her last night, and had some of your brandy—it was very good indeed. She said she thought it must be a bribe,' the girl said, with the deliberate intention of putting him off his stroke.

Colonel Jamieson was not easily put off his stroke, but he did look slightly disconcerted.

'Mrs. Hathaway really said that?'

'Of course—and I told her she was lucky to get such an excellent bribe,' Julia added.

All this free talk of bribery could hardly be pleasing to some-

one in the Colonel's position. He looked hard at the girl's beautiful impassive face, which wore its dumbest expression, trying to imagine this outrageous conversation.

'Well, I must leave you to your wicked and quite unfounded suspicions,' he said lightly. 'Did you talk about the Professor?'

'Oh yes—she had had a long letter from him. There *was* a doubled-up skeleton in that cist, and two beakers and a lot of beads. I wish we could have seen all that,' the girl said, her face now quite animated.

'Oh, you irresponsible creature! Nothing else?' At another time Philip Jamieson would have been genuinely interested in the discovery of a typical 'beaker' burial, with the appropriate pottery and beads; but he felt now—quite rightly—that Julia was making fun of him, and standing him off at the same time.

'Yes, there was some more.' She paused, thinking what to say first—in the end she employed the bouncing tactics which had served her with Mrs. Hathaway, and so often before. 'How much does your Office know about his excavations twenty-five years ago in Central Asia?' she asked. 'I should like to know that before I say much.'

He stared at her, astonished.

'Did she—Mrs. Hathaway—tell you about that?' he asked.

'No, I'd found it out before, quite by accident.'

'Before we met him?' Jamieson's voice was suddenly very cold.

'Oh don't be so silly! Of course not—after you'd gone South,' Julia said. 'But I'm not talking till you've talked! If you let me know what you know, I'll add anything I can. But I'm not making you any presents—or bribes,' she added, with a slightly malicious grin.

'You really are quite monstrous,' Jamieson said, half-laughing; he couldn't help himself. He too thought for a moment before he spoke.

'Yes, Burbage did do some excavations in Central Asia in 1936,' he went on, 'and allegedly got himself involved with the wife of a rather high-powered Soviet executive.'

'The Prof. involved with a woman? I can't believe it!'

'Well my dear he was, or so the Russians say—even a little pledge to prove it.'

'Unless I saw the pledge—who must be a strapping young Komsomol of over twenty by now—and noticed a marked

resemblance to the Prof., I should find that hard to credit,' Julia said. 'Oh, the *poor* old boy! And I suppose they've been turning the heat on him about this alleged bastard ever since?'

'About that, and other things. They said he hadn't handed over all the objects he found to the authorities, but smuggled some of them out through China.'

'Did he?'

'We don't know. He went out through China, certainly. But no one has ever seen these finds, and if they're still in China I don't suppose anyone ever will.' He paused. 'If Mrs. Hathaway didn't tell you about the Russian episode, who did?'

'Lady MacIan. Oh what an old idiot he is!' the girl exclaimed impatiently. 'He seems to have poured it all out to her—imagining, I suppose, that nothing said on Inch-Ian would ever get to London! Learned men really are the biggest fools of all'

The Colonel pounced on the mention of Inch-Ian.

'What was he doing there? That's quite close to the Erinishes, isn't it? Had he been to them, do you know?'

'Yes—he told Lady MacIan that too,' Julia said miserably. 'What a clot!'

'Did he tell Lady MacIan what he was doing on the Erinishes?'

'Oh, examining those silly forts! Anyhow, by his own quite dotty admission, there he was.'

'Hm. That's more tiresome still.' He waited for a moment or two, in silence. Then—'You said that after I had talked, you would talk. Well, I have. Had Mrs. Hathaway any light to throw on the Russian thing?'

'Nothing like as luminous as your account. She just said that one should never trust the Russians, and that he was too innocent to live, more or less—which we know,' Julia said drily. She hesitated, and then added—'And that he had been in torment for twenty-five years.'

'Thank you. Poor soul!' said Philip Jamieson. .

Chapter 7

ON the following Friday morning Colonel Jamieson, in Shamus Moran's hire-car, drove Julia Probyn out to the O'Haras for lunch. All Lady Helen's arrangements had worked out exactly as Julia had foretold. Mr. Moran had met them on Thursday afternoon at Martinstown with a small Volkswagen, in which, after dropping Jamieson at the Oldport Hotel, he had driven the girl on to Rostrunk, later returning the car to the hotel. Here Jamieson, who had heard much of the horrors of Irish hotels, had spent the night in a degree of comfort which astonished him, in a beautiful Georgian house, sold by its former owners, and—most surprising of all—with wonderful food. He had complimented Mr. Bowden-Brown, the landlord, on this after dinner, and learned to his amusement that it was produced by 'a girl out of the bog'. 'These Irish girls have a genius for cooking, if anyone takes the trouble to teach them; my wife taught her,' the landlord said. But Jamieson had also learned something else, which disconcerted him a good deal; namely that there was something seriously wrong with General O'Hara's motor-boat—'He'll not have it right till he gets a proper engineer from Galway or Dublin,' Mr. Bowden-Brown stated roundly. The Colonel expressed concern—he had been counting on that boat to get him to Clare Island to see the fulmars. The landlord told him not to worry—'You can drive down to Roonagh and cross in the mail boat, and stay at the inn; it only has the four bedrooms, but it's a decent little place enough.' But these tidings sent Jamieson to bed in a gloomy frame of mind. Would Julia be willing to stay with him in a tiny hotel, however 'decent'?

Next morning Julia had come in to Oldport on the bus to do Lady Helen's 'messages', i.e. her shopping errands; these they collected in the car, in every case with introductions of the Colonel, and warm hand-shakings—'You're heartily welcome,' was the invariable phrase. After picking up the messages Julia had taken him in for 'a quick one' at Josie Walsh's, a local publican who was a great source of gossip; there the Colonel had

listened to the latest story of salmon-poachers being caught, and the negative attitude of the country priests towards poaching. Mr. Walsh took advantage of Jamieson's car to send out a dozen bottles of stout to 'The General'—Julia refused to take more. 'Ah, Miss Probyn knows her own mind—but she's pleasant with it always,' Mr. Walsh said. Jamieson was struck, then and throughout the morning, by the evident affection for Julia which obtained in Oldport, and on the drive out he saw one reason for it. They overtook an old woman weighed down with bundles, and his companion made him pull up and bestowed the old party, whom she addressed as Katie, on the back seat. 'Did ye get married, Miss Probyn?' the old woman asked with deep interest. 'No, nothing of that sort, Katie,' Julia replied laughing. A couple of miles further on the old woman startled Jamieson by tapping him on the shoulder and saying 'Would you stand at the cross, sir?' Julia interpreted—'Pull up at this next turn on the right.' When Katie and her parcels had been extracted from the car she thanked them in the local fashion—'May the Holy Mother of God look after you every time you go out on the road. Ah, Sir,' she added to Jamieson, 'Miss Probyn will never leave anyone after her—and nor will Lady.'

'Why the "Stabat Mater" idea?' Jamieson asked, as they drove on.

'Any turn is a "cross", and "stand" just means to pull up,' Julia said. 'Now at the next cross you don't stand, you turn down to the left.'

Past more of the thatched one-storey whitewashed cottages, which stood at intervals all along the road, they came at last to the turning down to Rostrunk, a narrow lane enclosed on either side by high hedges. At the far end the hedges ceased suddenly, and the lane emerged into open stone-walled pastures, with the sea just beyond; to the right a small mediaeval tower rose at the water's very edge; directly in front a grey house loomed up among wind-slanted sycamores in which rooks were clamouring. It was a breath-taking sight—Jamieson slowed down to stare at it.

'What a magical place,' he said.

'Yes, isn't it? Straight on, over the cattle-stop,' she directed him; the car clanked over iron bars between stone gateposts, past meadows where cows were grazing, over a second cattle-stop, and followed a drive round an oval lawn up to the house.

The door was opened to them by an excessively pretty maid in a pink uniform and a pink muslin cap.

'Oh Attracta, there are parcels in the boot,' Julia said. 'Get Tom or Mick to help you in with the Guinness—it's heavy. Where is her ladyship?'

'Lady's in the garden yet, Miss Probyn—but the drinks are in the library.'

'Thank you, Attracta. Let's go and find Helen,' Julia said; she led him to a door in a high stone wall—as they passed through Jamieson paused in astonished delight. A paved path stretched away in front of them to a further wall, hung with ivy; broad borders flanked the path on either side, brilliant with phlox, pentstemons, big white daisies and red-hot-pokers—hedges of small-leaved escallonia backed them. Away to the left were plots of vegetables, bordered by gooseberries and currants laden with fruit; a neat orchard of young apple-trees, beautifully pruned, rose above the hedge on their right.

'Why do you call the maid a tractor?' the Colonel said. Julia laughed.

'Attracta was an Irish saint—I don't know anything about her. Everyone's children here are named for saints.' She raised her voice. 'Helen!' she called.

A tall figure rose from behind the farthest gooseberry-bushes, wiping the earth from her hands—Lady Helen was planting out lettuces.

'Is it lunch time?' she asked. 'Oh dear—I suppose I'm late, as usual. Is this Colonel Jamieson? How do you do—I'm too dirty to shake hands! Julia, just give a spot of water to these last ones, while I gather up my things.'

'Can's empty,' Julia said—'I'll get some more.' She walked over to a stand-pipe at an intersection of two grass paths and refilled the watering-can; the Colonel had already noticed several of these objects, studded about the garden, with approval—obviously a practical intelligence had been at work here. While Lady Helen wiped her trowel clean with the palm of her hand, and piled it and her other effects into a basket he said—'You have made a lovely garden here.'

'Well, one has to. What you don't grow yourself in Mayo, you don't eat—our nearest *good* greengrocer is in Dublin, a hundred and seventy-five miles away.'

'You seem to have everything here,' the Colonel said; his glance, straying over the garden, had noticed rows of raspberries under a north-facing wall, and a huge strawberry-bed—but instead of straw the ground round the strawberry-plants was covered with some dark substance. 'What is that you put round your strawberries?' he asked.

'Turf-dust. Mould and slugs are our great enemies here; straw encourages both, and turf-dust *defeats* both. It sticks to the slugs, so they avoid it; and it's completely anti-mould. These strawberries are rather interesting,' Lady Helen pursued. 'When I came here first I got plants from a neighbour, who said they were "Royal Sovereign". Then I read in the *R.H.S. Journal* that Royal Sovereign was subject to some ghastly disease, and that the thing to have was something called M.40, which was disease-resistant, and kept the old wonderful flavour. So I wrote to enquire, and was told that M.40 was the old County Mayo strain!—M. standing for Mayo.'

'How quite delightful,' Jamieson said, picking up the basket. He studied his hostess with interest. Lady Helen was tall, rather beautiful, still dark and still slender, though he put her age at about fifty; in spite of her interest in gardening she gave a curious impression of detachment, almost of remoteness, as if her interior life was somewhere else. They went back up the paved path between the glowing borders, Julia following, but instead of going through the door onto the drive, Lady Helen led them through a long workshop, its bench under the windows set with vices, a lathe, and even a drill; the rafters were festooned with rolls of galvanised wire of varying weights. The Colonel was impressed.

'What a splendid place.'

'Oh, it's my husband's Paradise. Very useful, too—one has to be rather self-dependent, here.' She passed through a door-way at the farther end, where a small room with an array of garden-tools opened on the left. 'The basket stays here—thank you so much' Lady Helen said. 'Just one second, while I wash my boots.' She was wearing rubber Wellingtons, and as she spoke opened another door which gave onto a lawn and the sea; just outside it was a grating set over a sump, and above this a tap to which a piece of rubber hose was attached—Lady Helen stood on the grating, turned on the tap, and sloshed her rubber boots with

water; then she came in, pulled off her boots, and stuffed her narrow feet into a pair of slippers. She did this in a very small room with a basin—in the passage beyond it coats, oilskins, and Burberrys hung from hooks on the wall.

‘This is really the gents,’ Lady Helen said—‘basin if you want to wash, and that door. I’m afraid we’re rather muddled up, here.’

‘I think you’re quite amazingly well organised,’ the Colonel said. ‘I never saw anything like that before.’ He indicated the sump and the tap.

‘Oh, one must have a boot-wash in Mayo! My husband designed it—*do* tell him you like it. Not the gents?—very well, come in.’ She led him and Julia up the coat-draped passage and through a door into a small room with a telephone, and racks of fishing-rods on the walls; she opened a door which led into a library, where shelves full of books lined the walls from floor to ceiling.

‘How beautiful!’ the Colonel exclaimed, almost involuntarily; the shelves, and the cupboards below them, were all of some exotic wood of a lovely shade of orange.

‘You like it? Do tell Michael—he designed it. Julia, give the Colonel a drink while I wash my hands.’ Calmly, she went away.

‘These must be some of the most intelligent people in the world’ Jamieson said, while Julia poured him a Gin and Orange. ‘Everything practical, and everything beautiful.’ He took his glass over to the western window, which gave on a long narrow inlet leading out towards an open horizon. ‘Is that the Atlantic out there?’ he asked.

‘Yes. I’m glad you like this place; they have been rather clever about it, I agree.’

A door at the other side of the library opened as she spoke—the Colonel had already been struck by the fact that all the rooms at Rostrunk seemed to have two, if not three doors—and a short thickset man with stiff grizzled hair came in.

‘Hullo, Julia—is this your friend? How d’y do?’ he said, holding out his hand. ‘Has Julia given you a drink? Ah, good.’ He poured one out for himself, and turned to his guest. ‘Now you’re Colonel Jamieson—that right?’ General O’Hara made these enquiries in a business-like fashion which fitted in with all those stand-pipes, and the well-equipped workshop, and the

boot-wash, Jamieson felt. 'The Borderers?' his host pursued.

'Yes, Sir.'

'Don't you go calling me "Sir"! I bet you're very close to my age. How old are you?'

'Forty-six, General.' *b*

'Ah—well you look more,' O'Hara said bluntly. 'I've have given you fifty-five.'

'Well as he's so relatively young, may he go on calling you "Sir", Michael?' Julia put in.

'Now none of your lip, young woman! This girl has no respect for anyone or anything,' the General said to Jamieson—'she's a holy terror. I hope you realise that, for your own sake.'

'Don't be a toad, Michael,' Julia said calmly—she saw that Jamieson was slightly embarrassed. 'You know you're really devoted to me.' She planted a kiss on his grizzled head.

'There she goes!' the General said. 'Get away with anything, Julia will. Where were you in this last war?'

There followed some conversation about regiments and campaigns; Julia presently broke into it with a question.

'Michael, who are all these glasses for? Are people coming to lunch?' She indicated the huge silver tray, not very well polished, standing on a small heavy oak table.

'Oh God, yes!—Helen will have people in. The MacMahons are coming. He writes novels, and he'll put you in a book as soon as look at you,' O'Hara said to Jamieson. 'He's put us in one already. They came and took a little house down the bay, and we were all nice to them, of course—Dublin people, they didn't know how to go on here in the least. And before you could turn round, out comes a novel in London, with everyone here and in Oldport drawn to the life!'

'There was a murder, and Josie, whom you met this morning, was the murderce,' Julia said, with her soft giggle.

'Oh, so you went and had one with Josie?' the General said. 'Then no more gin for you, Julia.'

'We brought out a dozen of your stout, Michael,' Julia said. 'Surely that merits another little gin?'

'We'll see. Now you're one of these bird-men, and want to study the fulmars on Clare Island, I gather,' O'Hara said to Jamieson.

Jamieson had done his home-work to some purpose; he had

bought and read the book on fulmars, and responded very adequately.

'Ah. Well our boat's out of action for the moment, some trouble with the engine; but the boys say they'll have her all right in a day or so. Delighted to run you over then. Shall you want to stay on the island?'

'I might need to,' Jamieson said cautiously.

At this moment the pretty parlourmaid opened the door and ushered in a tall, exuberantly handsome man and a small very pretty woman.

'Hullo, Blanaid—nice to see you. Morning, Tony,' the General greeted them. 'This is Colonel Jamieson.' The Colonel shook hands, recognising that the couple must be the novelist and his wife—how odd that a woman should be called Blarney, he thought, not realising how Mrs. MacMahon's name was spelt. Pouring out drinks the General, to his relief, explained him further—'He's one of these bird-men; he's come to study the fulmars on Clare Island.'

Just then Lady Helen swam into the room—there is no other word for the calm smoothness of her entrance—shook hands with the MacMahons, and poured herself a drink. She had changed her dress and arranged her dark hair and her face; her beauty was more striking than ever.

'Now Helen, you don't want all that gin,' the General said. 'It's time for lunch.'

'Oh my darling, I do want it *desperately*,' his wife replied. 'Such a morning of toil!—setting all those infernal lettuces.'

'Why don't you let Mick set them? What do we pay him for?'

'I can't think! Anyhow he's no good at setting lettuces,' Lady Helen said. She turned to Jamieson. 'What is so odd about the Irish is that they can't sing, and they can't garden,' she observed.

'Now Helen—' the General began to protest, when Attracta appeared and said that luncheon was ready.

The door of the library by which the party now left it led through a narrow little passage, like a tunnel, with a low vaulted ceiling, into an oval hall running up the whole height of the house to an oval dome capped with a lantern; a slender spindly staircase, with a graceful gilt balustrade, wound round the wall to the floor above. —

'Goodness, how beautiful!' Jamieson could not restrain the exclamation.

'Pretty, isn't it?' the General said, pleased. 'The lantern is all teak and copper—nothing else will stand up to this climate.'

'Michael, the mussels are getting cold!' his wife called to him—'do come in and let us have something to eat.'

The two men followed her down a second tunnelled and vaulted passage, a replica of the one leading from the library, into the dining-room, and sat down at a long mahogany table, where *Attracta* and another maid handed round dishes of mussels in a border of buttered rice, swimming in a velvety sauce flavoured with their own liquor.

'You're not afraid of mussels?' his hostess asked the Colonel.

'Goodness no—only they're such a nuisance *marinières*, with the shells piling up on the side of one's plate. This is much more convenient—and quite delicious' Jamieson replied. 'What an inspiration to have rice with them, too. Where do you get them?'

'Oh, the maids go down and pick them off the rocks out there,' Lady Helen said, with a gesture towards the western window. 'They love doing it—they go in their feet.'

The General overheard this statement.

'Helen, how can he know what you mean? "In their feet" means barefoot,' he informed the Colonel.

'Oh, thank you.' Jamieson had in fact found the phrase puzzling. 'Are you Irish?' he asked the beautiful dark woman beside him.

'Not a drop!' Lady Helen replied briskly.

While chickens in a béchamel sauce succeeded the mussels, Jamieson mentioned to his hostess his strong sense of being in a foreign country.

'Oh yes, it is utterly foreign. You see even the people who haven't a word of Irish speak an English directly translated *from* the Irish, and it's very puzzling. Our herd's cottage is directly east of this house; when I first came here, and his little children came straying along the path pulling the heads off the flowers, I used to tell them to go back to Mama. But that was no good at all—"back" means West, and "over" means East, so the babies were merely confused; they know the points of the compass in their cradles!'

'Fantastic!' the Colonel said.

'Yes, it is. Then there's "above" and "below"; the points of the compass again. "Above" is the South, because the sun is highest there; "below" is North. My husband rents fishings from Mr. Williams on Lough Darna and the Derrycooldrim Lough; Derrycooldrim lies nearly a hundred feet above Lough Darna, but it is always called "The Lough below", because it lies due north of Darna.'

The Colonel considered this.

'Should you be affronted if I said that there may be some excuse for the English view that the Irish are slightly mad?' he asked at length.

'Oh no—I don't go in for being affronted, and I'm not Irish, as I told you. Where I do think the English have been stupid is in failing to realise, over six centuries or thereabouts, what you seem to have spotted in twenty-four hours—that this is a foreign country, and no efforts of theirs could ever make it anything else.'

'I expect you have something there.'

'Do have some more chicken'—his hostess said—'there's nothing else except strawberries.'

'The M.40s?' the Colonel asked, gratefully giving himself a second helping of chicken. 'By the way, may I mention what delicious food you have? Do you do it, or a girl out of the bog?'

Helen looked at him in surprise.

'You seem to be unusually quick at picking things up,' she said. 'Most people ask where I got my chef; but actually Nonie is a girl out of the bog. I've coached her, of course, and the only cookery-book I allow in the kitchen is André Simon's *Gastronomic Dictionary*. But how did you guess?'

The Colonel explained about his conversation with Mr. Bowden-Brown the previous evening.

'I see. Yes, the local girls have got this curious gift for cooking—so odd, when you think that at home they live mainly on potatoes and soda-bread, and do all their cooking over an open turf fire.'

'What is soda-bread?'

'What you're eating—whole-meal flour with soda and skim-milk.'

'It's delicious,' Jamieson said.

'Of course one has to harry them to a certain extent about cleanness,' Lady Helen went on tolerantly; 'that definitely isn't

one of their things, except in the dairy—because as they say themselves, “You can’t fool butter”.’ •

‘I’m not sure that I understand. You make your own butter, I gather?’

‘Yes, of course. And unless everything to do with it is perfectly clean the butter turns rancid. Even the board on which you beat and shape it has to be scrubbed and scalded.’

‘It’s a charming expression,’ the Colonel said. ““You can’t fool butter”!”’ he repeated, with relish.

‘Mind you, it isn’t so easy for them,’ his hostess said. ‘Not one of those houses you saw coming out from Oldport has piped water; every drop has to be carried from “the spring-well”, which may be as much as a hundred yards away—and then boiled in a kettle over the fire for scalding or washing.’

‘Not really?’

‘But certainly. That’s why it seems so astonishing to me that these girls come to a house like this, and fit into it so easily.’

Fresh plates were laid, and a huge blue-and-white Nanking dish of strawberries was handed round. Colonel Jamieson helped himself.

‘Well if these are the Old Mayo strain, it was well worth preserving,’ he said, after tasting the fruit. ‘The flavour is superb. Who produces the M.40?’

‘Oh, some research place near Cambridge.’

The Colonel would have liked a second helping of strawberries too, but his host called impatiently down the table to his wife—‘Helen, are we never to have coffee?’—and the party moved back through the tunnelled passage, the hall, and into the drawing-room; as he entered Jamieson paused again, in the same delighted astonishment that he had experienced when he walked through the door into the garden. This seemed to be a feature of Rostrunk, he thought—doors opening onto quite unexpected beauty. The room was roughly diamond-shaped: a large bow-window giving onto the lawn and the sea was exactly reproduced by two slanting walls at the inner end—a design rendered imperative, he realised, by the slant of the tunnelled passages from the library and the dining-room; between these two features were longer stretches of wall, one of which held the fireplace, the other a shallow arched recess. The room was all white; a white carpet, white covers on the furniture, a French wall-

paper with delicate gilt wreaths on a white ground; the only notes of colour were the curtains, printed in a soft pink, a vieux-rose hearth-rug, and pink cushions on the white sofa and armchairs.

'What a beautiful room!' he said to his host.

'Yes, it is—only it was dotty of Helen to insist on a white carpet here in Mayo, where everyone's boots are covered with mud all the year round, and the house full of dogs and cats! *Sit, Wellington!*' he said to a large Labrador—too late; with a joyful wave of his oarshaped tail, the happy dog swept Mrs. MacMahon's coffee-cup off a small table onto the floor, where the coffee sank into the milk-white thickness of the carpet.

'There you are!' General O'Hara said. 'What did I tell you?'

'Julia, do ring the bell,' Lady Helen said with the utmost calmness. 'Oh Attracta, another cup, please, and ask Annie to bring a cloth.'

While the ravages caused by Wellington's exuberance were being mopped up, Mr. MacMahon came over and started to talk to the Colonel.

'Are you really here to look at birds?' he began.

'Yes.' Jamieson bestowed a rather chilly glance on the handsome young novelist. 'I'm interested in fulmars in particular,' he added.

'Yes, so they said. I thought you were something to do with M.I.5' MacMahon said.

'Why should you think that?' the Colonel asked, in a completely neutral tone.

'Oh, someone mentioned it—in London, I think. But if you're interested in birds it's a pity you weren't here three months earlier; this spring we had a Rosy Pastor in full plumage keeping company with the starlings along the shore.'

'I wish I'd seen that,' Jamieson said. But he had never heard of Rosy Pastors, and was disconcerted to find that at least one person in Mayo had guessed at his real occupation. His main idea at the moment was to escape from Mr. MacMahon—and in this Julia, as so often, came to his aid.

'Colonel Jamieson, I'm going to ask Lady Helen to let us be a little rude and run away at once,' she said blandly, coming up to the two men. 'There's something I want to show you.'

'What do you want to show him?' MacMahon asked.

'Something archaeological—about which you, poor Tony,

know nothing, however knowledgeable you may be about birds!' Julia said briskly. They made their excuses and farewells, and went out across the hall to the Volkswagen. •

'Mind if I drive?' Julia said, sliding into the driving-seat.

'Not in the least. Did you overhear that man?'

'Yes. He's a menace. That's why I took you away.' She turned left over the cattle-stop at the end of the drive, and along a small road which followed the long arm of the sea out towards the Atlantic; presently it bent up over a hill, and deteriorated into a true Irish 'bohíreen', a muddy track full of deep puddles, so narrow that the hawthorns of the hedges on either side scratched the car as it passed.

'I say, look out! What will Mr. Moran say if we spoil his car?' Jamieson exclaimed.

'He's hired it to you to drive about Mayo, and he knows well enough what Mayo is like,' Julia replied easily. 'Don't worry.'

'What archaeological object are you taking me to see?'

'Something very queer indeed—a graveyard.'

'Why should a graveyard be queer?' the Colonel asked, as the car ran down a hill; Julia swung it round a bend at the bottom, and it was only as they were driving along a gentle, green, grassy valley that she answered him.

'This one is called Killecn. A Killeen is a place where they bury unbaptised babies and bodies washed up by the sea, when no one knows what their religion was.'

'Does it matter what their religion was?'

'Yes, here.' As she spoke Julia turned the car into an open space, and got out.

Beside the road a small stream ran in a curve below a circular wall, within which gravestones stood up; the stream passed under a small bridge, beyond which, on the seashore, was a rectangle of dry-built stone walling. In the centre stood a sort of altar from which rose, rather crookedly, an upright of roughly-hewn stone.

'Is that the remains of a cross-shaft?' the Colonel asked.

'No—it's a phallic symbol. This is a pre-Christian site. But the people call it St. Brendan's Altar, and have a Pater here on his day—a sort of "Pardon", like the ones in Brittany.'

'What do they do?'

'Come and say prayers, the children especially—they get a holiday for it.'

'Has no one here any idea what it really is?' Jamieson asked.

'That's impossible to find out—Helen has tried over and over again, and got nowhere. But that upright stone is washed over every so often, in a gale, and it is always most carefully replaced.'

'Who by?'

'Someone. No one ever admits to having done it.'

'Very odd,' the Colonel said. He looked about him.

'Can one go in?'

'Of course.'

At the entrance to the burial-ground at Killeen steps led up to a gap in the wall with a tall flat-topped slab in the middle, and spaces on either side. 'What a curious arrangement,' he commented.

'That's the coffin-stone. The bearers heave the coffin up and rest it on that while they go through; the gaps are narrow enough to keep cattle out.' As she spoke Julia slid through one of them.

The Colonel followed. But when he stepped inside that circular wall he did a very odd thing. It was his habit in the country to go about bare-headed; but with characteristic Scottish prudence he carried a cap in his pocket in case of rain. Now, as he entered the graveyard at Killeen, instinctively he drew his cap out and put it on. Julia watched with interest. It was a fine warm day—the weather afforded no possible reason for covering one's head.

'Do you always put your cap on when you go into a graveyard?' she asked—could it be that Philip Jamieson recognised this place for what it was, so quickly and so fully?

He looked embarrassed.

'No, usually I uncover my head in churchyards. I don't really know quite why I put my cap on,' he said—'but somehow I did.' He paused. 'Julia, I think this must be an evil place,' her sophisticated friend said, surprisingly. 'In holy places one bares one's head; here I somehow felt it must be covered.'

Julia was immensely pleased. She rather collected the reactions of people to Killeen—and Jamieson's were particularly important to her.

'Oh, it's evil all right,' she said. 'Come up to the Cursing Stone.'

They walked uphill between rough grassed-over grave-mounds; Julia paused to show Jamieson an inner circular wall of large stones which encompassed the summit—he struggled up to it.

'But this must be Bronze Age, or at latest Iron Age,' he called down to her, after examining the massive unmortared blocks.

'I daresay. Come and see the Cursing Stone.'

The Cursing Stone increased the Colonel's sense of evil at Killeen. He insisted first on walking round the site, and found the turf-covered remains of a chapel. Below this was the Cursing Stone, a slab of natural rock with nine hollows scooped out of its surface, each covered with a lump of limestone. Julia lifted two of the stones. In the hollow below one of them lay pennies and half-pennies, probably the gifts of women desiring a child; but the other contained more sinister offerings: pins, knife-blades, and the broken-off halves of a pair of scissors, along with more copper coins.

'There you are, you see—cut or stab your enemy,' Julia said. 'Steel and iron have magic powers.'

'It's horrifying,' Jamieson said. 'Do you mean this still goes on, today?'

'Oh yes.' She lifted a penny from between the knife-blades and the broken scissors, and read the date. '1956.'

'And yet they make pilgrimages here?'

'Certainly; the children walk round this very slab saying their Paters and Aves on St. Brendan's Day.'

'God have mercy on us!' the Colonel said fervently.

'They walk round clockwise to say their prayers, but one has to go widdershins—anti-clockwise—to curse,' Julia informed him, 'and turn each stone anti-clockwise too.'

'How on earth do you know that, if no one will say anything about it?'

'Because I was up in the Six Counties, where there's a far more famous Cursing Stone—it was the centre for the worship of Crom Cruach, who was a sort of Irish Beelzebub. The local parson was a bit of an anthropologist, and studied the whole business for years. There were the most extraordinary goings-on up there! Within living memory the country-people used to row across the Lough on a certain day in the summer, their faces stained black with bilberry juice, and dance on the shore below Crom Cruach's altar till three in the morning.'

'And this is supposed to be the Isle of Saints and Scholars,' the Colonel commented.

'Oh, all this is only one angle. Ireland is absolutely full of

humble saints too, bursting with faith and devotion—I wouldn't know about scholars.'

'All the same, this black paganism just below the surface is most extraordinary, in the twentieth century,' Jamieson pursued.

'Oh, it isn't so far below the surface either! There are always Baal-fires on St. John's Eve, the old Midsummer Festival; the isolated holdings light their own. Old Katie, whom you met this morning, never fails to have her Midsummer bonfire.'

'Do they think of them as Baal-fires?'

'No, nor as anything to do with St. John—it's just "a custom". I asked Katie once what it was all about, and she came out with a long story to the effect that it commemorated Cromwell's soldiers having burnt some "patriots". That means nothing; it's the Irish complex about Cromwell. Even Father Murphy said once to Helen—"Give the Irish people long enough, and they'll have it settled that 'twas Oliver Cromwell crucified Our Blessed Lord!"'

Jamieson laughed at that, but rather uncomfortably.

'I was staying here once in November,' Julia went on—'and old Katie came down to see Helen, bringing a pair of black cockerels, *alive*, dangling from her hand. Helen was out, and I gave her a gin—"a treat" is always worth while with Katie, it loosens her tongue. So Katie put the "cockcens" down on the floor of the gun-room, and she said—"Tell Lady not to be wringing their necks, but to be shplitting their throats, and to shprinkle the blood in the dairy, and the haggard, and the cow-stable. 'Tis lucky." Now what do you think of that?—the blood of *black* cockerels! And it was to be done on November the tenth, "Mairtin's Eve"—that was the day Katie came down.'

The Colonel stood up.

'I think I've had about as much black magic as I need for the moment,' he said. 'John Buchan would have loved it, but I don't.' He held out a hand to Julia, and pulled her to her feet. 'Come on.'

They went down to the curious entrance and returned to the car. Jamieson removed his neat check cap, and stuffed it into his pocket again.

'Goodness, you are superstitious,' Julia said as she started the engine—but she was rather pleased.

Chapter 8

WHEN Julia drove away from Killcen she followed some narrow lanes to the County road, crossed it, and drove on up into 'the mountain', where a big valley opened in front of them, enclosed by rocky peaks; close at hand lay a small lake bordered by water-lilies in flower, their pointed petals spread wide to the sun, white as the solitary swan which swam quietly among them. The little lake reminded Jamieson of his meeting with Julia earlier in the summer in Mr. Robertson's shop at Tobermory, and the tweed she had made him buy. 'Do they make the water-lily tweed here?' he asked.

'I don't think so—I've never seen it. They use quite a few wild dyes: crottle, of course, off the rocks on the shore.' She swung right as she spoke, and drove along a narrow track where heather and rushes grew between the wheel-ruts; at intervals on both sides stacks of dried turf, fourteen feet high or more, stood like immense black grave-mounds. Jamieson was struck by the care with which these stacks had been built: all the outer turfs placed slanting downwards and overlapping one another, like tiles on a roof; he commented on it.

'Yes, to keep the wet out. "Winding", they call it,' the girl said, twisting the Volkswagen skilfully through the skiddy silver sand of the track between the huge funereal turf-stacks. They were now right-up on the bog, whence the whole countryside obtained its supply of fuel for the year; Julia pointed out to her companion the black vertical faces of peat, four feet high—the 'banks' from which it was cut. Each household, she explained, had a bank allotted to it—'That's Michael's bank,' she said, pointing. 'Oh, how late the Gradys are with theirs—they've still got it footed.' She pointed again at some odd little cubical erections, studding the heathy ground above another cutting.

'What is the point of that?' Jamieson asked.

'To dry the turf. When it's cut it's wet; the men throw it out anyhow on the top of the bank, and then someone, women as a rule, comes up to "foot" it—piles the sods up so that the air can

get through to dry them. It's a ghastly job, footing.'

'Have you ever done it?' the man asked incredulously.

'Oh yes, often—to cheer the maids on,' Julia said blithely. 'You kneel on soggy ground, soaking your skirt, and stretch out and pile, and stretch out and pile again—and the turfs are so damp and slimy that it's a fearful business to make them stand up. Nonie and Attracta do it far better than me,' she added. She was enjoying showing Philip Jamieson all these things, so familiar to her, so new to him; when he understood, and reacted in the same way that she did, as he had done at Killeen, she felt they had come a step nearer to one another, in a pleasantly sidelong manner. He was not a very easy person to approach directly—his Scottishness, she supposed, fundamentally, and on the surface his cautious official manner. She turned to glance at him sideways: dark, handsome—goodness, he *was* good-looking; not so completely the Army man as dear Michael, much more intelligent and susceptible; but with a certain rather intimidating rigidity, all the same.

As she turned away to watch their road, Jamieson looked with astonishment at the figure beside him, in her beautifully-cut country clothes. So she had footed turf! How much she knew that he didn't know, he thought; and what a beguiling humility, that caused her to undertake such tasks to 'cheer on' her cousin's servants. He *must* get her to come with him to Clare Island; he would be nowhere without her. In fact at that moment Philip Jamieson, finally and definitely, realised that he would be nowhere without Julia Probyn, as long as he lived.

The track turned downhill again, and became stony and immensely steep—at the foot of the descent Julia pulled up.

'That's Katie's cottage,' she said, pointing to a thatched cabin. 'Mind if I just run in and see her for a second? Helen gave me something for her.'

'Not in the least. May I come too?'

Jamieson had never seen anything in the least like old Katie's house. They approached it by crossing a gap in a stone wall and following a tiny grassy path across a very wet field, where geese and a couple of cows grazed; hens were scratching in front of the little whitewashed structure, whose door stood open.

'Katie?' Julia called.

The old woman appeared at the door, her hands all floury.

'Miss Probyn! You're heartily welcome, and the gentleman too. Come in—I'm just after making me some bread.' *

The room into which Julia and Jamieson followed Katie had an earthen floor, and contained a small kitchen table, two or three wooden chairs, and beside the open hearth a bed built in against the wall, heaped with hand-woven blankets—'the nest'; wiping her hands on a cloth, the old woman drew a pair of painted hinged shutters across the bed, enclosing it, Over the open turf fire a shallow iron pan hung from a chain, its lid heaped with glowing embers; a kettle stood among the white ashes on the hearth, flanked by a tin tea-pot.

'Would you take a cup of tea, Miss Probyn? The kettle will boil in a minyit' Katie said, making to unhook the pan from the chain.

'No, Katie—don't be spoiling your bread! But Lady Helen asked me to bring you this, if I should be passing.' As she spoke she opened her handbag and drew out a flask of gin.

'Well may the Lord love her!' the old woman exclaimed. 'Lady thinks of everyone. 'Tis pity she'd ever die!'

Jamieson continued to look about him. On a very small shelf fixed to the wall above the table a tiny oil-lamp burned in front of two brightly-painted statues, one of the Infant Jesus of Prague, the other of Our Lady, adorned by a jam-jar filled with rather faded wild-flowers; the black cloak and shawl which the old woman had been wearing when they picked her up on the road that morning hung from two pegs on the wall. Opposite the hearth and the bed was a recess enclosed by broad-gauge wire netting; the straw which floored it was covered with goose-droppings, which smelt rather strong. Colonel Jamieson's training had led him to accurate observation—he had looked at the cabin as he walked up that wet field, and realised that what he now saw was the whole house.

'Do your geese sleep in there?' he asked old Katie, with a gesture towards the wired recess.

'They do that, Sir. The foxes is something terrible, here in the mountain, and geese are slow and foolish. And at night they do be company for me.'

The Scotchman was extraordinarily moved by those last words. He envisaged the very old woman, all alone in her isolated little house, getting companionship from the presence of

the white gentle geese, penned behind the wire, which she could see from her bed in the glow of the fire; and feeling blessed by the two common little statues, which however lamentable aesthetically were, for her, a constant visual reminder of the faith by which she lived.

He said something of this to Julia when, after she had kissed old Katie goodbye, they squelched down over the wet field again towards the car. Julia was pleased.

'Katie's very heroic,' she said. 'I rather wanted you to see how she lives. The Geraghtys, in that farm up there, are very good to her; if her cows run dry they bring her milk, and they win her turf for her, and save her hay.'

'What do you mean by "win" her turf?'

'Oh, cut it, and foot it, and get it down—in ass-panniers, usually. Katie's too old for all that.'

'And what is "saving" hay? What we should call making hay?'

'Yes. Only you see here the climate is so frightful that any harvest you manage to get is literally "saved"—at least I imagine that's how the expression arose.' She stepped over the gap in the wall, and got into the car. As they drove off she said—'Katie is the sort of person I had in mind when I said that Ireland is still full of humble saints. I don't think anyone has ever heard her complain about anything. Even when her daughter, whom she adored, died, all she said was "God knows best".'

But there was something on which Julia felt she had to approach the Colonel directly. MacMahon's reference after lunch to M.I.5 had resuscitated all her worry over Professor Burbage, which had been swamped temporarily by her pleasure at being in Mayo again, and introducing Jamieson to the delightful peculiarities of the place. Nothing could make her next task completely easy—but it was made a little easier by his reaction to old Katie. Where the track crossed a rise above the little valley in which the cabin stood she pulled in to one side, and stopped the engine. In front of them spread the whole expanse of the Bay with its innumerable islands—people say there is one for every day in the year—enclosed to the south by the pointed peak of Croagh Patrick, the mountain from whose summit the Saint supposedly banished all serpents from Ireland. A large blue island, low at the southern end, rising to fall away in vertical cliffs on the northern one, spanned the mouth of the Bay.

'What a glorious view! Is that Clare Island?' the Colonel asked, looking out to sea.

'Yes.' She paused, and lit a cigarette. 'What are you going to do about the Prof.?' she asked abruptly.

He turned to her, troubled by this sudden break in their happy mood. When he answered it was with his usual caution.

'For the present, nothing. He appears to be useful to us, now and again, as a pointer to what we're after.'

'Yes, I see that. But later?' she pressed him.

'I really can't tell you—I don't know. Mind you, we have no positive *proof* that he is involved; only circumstantial evidence.'

'What do you mean by that? The Russian business?'

'Yes; and the rather curious fact that he never published anything about his discoveries in Central Asia.'

So Jamieson knew that, too!

'Of course what we heard in Stornoway looked like a certain degree of corroboration,' the Colonel went on—'so did his having been on the Erinishes, and what Mrs. Hathaway said to you.'

'Did you report that?' Julia asked sharply.

'No. I've been trying to play him down as far as possible. Fortunately those three bogus Swedes tracking us, and that Russian trawler coming out of Loch Roag without lights, gave me quite a reasonable amount to report for the moment, without—er—well without using what you learned at that garage, and—and all the rest,' he ended rather awkwardly.

'Thank you. It *would* be nice if Mrs. Hathaway and I were the ones whose evidence really convicted him!' Julia said bitterly, staring out at the blue Atlantic with almost unseeing eyes. If she had been less upset she would have enjoyed telling Jamieson about Croagh Patrick and the snakes, but she was miserable at the thought of the poor old Prof. in the clutches of the merciless official machine.

Jamieson was upset too; his growing feeling for her disturbed his usual clarity and measured coolness. He caught her hand.

'Julia, do try to have a little patience,' he said brusquely. 'Do you think I like it any more than you do, all this trouble about old Burbage?—who must be a very silly old man, *so* silly that one is inclined to believe him innocent! Why did he have to tell Lady MacIan that he'd been on the Erinishes, if he was really up to no good there? That's what puzzles me about him, and about

the whole business. *How* silly is he?’

‘Oh well, he’s old—and never thinks about anything but archaeology. Yes, I suppose he *is* pretty silly,’ Julia admitted, somewhat mollified.

‘Well please don’t think I like him and his silliness coming between you and me, when we get on rather well, and were beginning to like one another—or weren’t we? Yes or no?’ he asked, increasing his pressure on her hand, which he still held.

‘Yes.’

‘Well there you are; nothing could be more awkward.’ He paused; the words he wanted wouldn’t come; for the first time in his life Philip Jamieson found himself almost inarticulate, obsessed by the sensation of Julia’s long cool hand in his. He struggled on, *gauchely*.

‘Out of affection you’re on his side; out of duty you have to be on mine. You’re in a cleft stick,’ he ended sadly—‘and it isn’t particularly nice for me to see you there.’

Julia was touched by his obvious distress and incompetence—she understood the reason for it all right, and secretly her heart rejoiced.

‘Oh well,’ she said vaguely. ‘Let’s hope for the best.’ Very gently she drew her hand out of his, and lit another cigarette.

But the Colonel had a further preoccupation of his own; relieved by the way she had accepted his clumsy words, he aired it. ‘How well do you know this MacMahon man?’ he asked.

‘Very slightly. He can be great fun.’

‘Know anything of his background?’

‘Nothing, except that they came here from Dublin, and that he writes these very amusing thrillers. He goes over to London a lot to see his publishers and his literary agent, naturally.’

‘You never met him there?’

‘Goodness, no! I don’t move in literary circles. But I agree that it’s odd that he should seem to know about you.’

‘It’s also uncommonly *ti esome*.’ Jamieson sat, frowning.

‘I shouldn’t try ringing up from here,’ Julia said, accurately guessing his thoughts. ‘Rosie Carey listens to every *word* on London calls. I should write.’

The Colonel still frowned in thought.

‘Would O’Hara know anything about him and his contacts?’ he asked at length.

'Oh, I shouldn't think so.' She paused, and considered. 'What exactly do you want to know?' the girl asked then. 'Whether Tony is, or ever has been, a parlour pink, or something?'

'Something on those lines. I really want to learn all I can about him—the oddest facts often throw some light.'

'Then I think Josie is probably your best bet—he knows everything about everyone. Only we shall have to be a bit crafty. Let's go in now; there'll hardly be anyone about as early as this.'

'Oughtn't we to go back to Rostrunk for tea? I told Lady Helen I would.'

'That doesn't matter. If we're too late for tea we can go at drinks-time.'

When Julia and the Colonel walked into Walsh's Hotel a quarter of an hour later there was no sign of Josie; a very small woman with a peculiarly sweet expression greeted Julia with the warmth which Jamieson was beginning to expect in Mayo; he found it warming. Why couldn't everyone be as affectionate as the Irish, he thought; it was very nice. After the usual greetings Julia said—

'Where's Josie, Mary Ellen?'

'I'll fetch him, Miss Probyn, if you want to see him.'

'Only if he's about.'

Mrs. Walsh disappeared through the door at the back; the place, as Julia had foreseen, was quite empty.

'Poor Josie—I expect he's having a nap' Julia said. 'What on earth can we drink at this time of day?'

'Benedictine, I think.' He was studying the array of bottles behind the counter.

'Oh, Josie,' Julia said, when Mr. Walsh appeared, 'we happened to be in town again, so I thought we might as well take out the rest of the General's stout.' (This useful excuse had occurred to her while Mrs. Walsh was fetching her husband.)

'Right, Miss Probyn.' Mr. Walsh hollered for a youth called P. J., and instructed him to put the stout in the car. 'Now will you take a little something, Miss Probyn?'

'Yes, please. We both want Benedictines. And this time, Josie, you're going to have something *nice* with us.'

Mr. Walsh, having arranged their unwanted drinks said that for his part he should like a small brandy.

'Well have something *decent*, Josie.'

Jamieson watched with interest to see what the publican would choose. After rummaging about on an upper shelf, to his amazement Mr. Walsh brought down a bottle of Hine 1906, and poured himself out a glass.

'Good God! If I'd known you'd got that I'd have had some,' Jamieson said. 'How on earth did you come by it?'

'I've had this a fair while,' Mr. Walsh replied—'I have good friends in France who get some nice stuff over to me from time to time.' As he spoke he took the Colonel's glass of Benedictine, emptied it into a small sink behind the counter, and poured him out a fresh one of the priceless brandy. 'If you're a brandy man, Colonel, please accept this. There's not a soul in this place knows one brandy from another—not even the General, God help him! 'Tis Guinness or whiskey he be's drinking always.'

'That's because of his heart, Josie; he's not allowed brandy, and the Doctors prescribe him whiskey' Julia said. But she was pleased at the turn the conversation had taken; it might put Mr. Walsh in a pliable mood.

It did. Presently—'And how do you like Rostrunk, Colonel?' Josie asked.

'One of the loveliest houses in Europe,' Jamieson replied. 'And such delightful people to meet there. I thought little Mrs. MacMahon so charming.' He risked forcing the pace a little; he thought it might help Julia if he gave her a lead.

'Ah, she's nice all right—a good, hard-working little woman,' Mr. Walsh said judgmatically, sipping his Hine, and looking reflective.

'Josie, what did Mr. MacMahon do for a living before he came down here, and started writing these books about everybody?' Julia enquired, leaning confidentially across the counter. She was grateful for Jamieson's lead, and followed it at once.

'He was a dancer!' Mr. Walsh replied. 'Danced in these big ballays in London, they tell me.' He refilled his own and Jamieson's glasses—Julia saw with satisfaction that Josie was well launched on his favourite occupation of *raconteur*. 'One time in Dublin he was bankrupt,' the publican went on, 'and they put the bailiffs in. He had an engagement in England that would pay off all his debts, but they wouldn't let him away. So he sent out for a bottle of whiskey—to a house where he was known, ye understand—and he fed the whiskey to the bailiffs, and danced

to them till they was dizzy! Then he got out of the window and climbed down the drainpipe, and away with him to England to his job—and came back with the money to clear himself.'

Both Julia and Jamieson laughed heartily at this story; however it did not yield them much of the information they required.

'But what sort of a person is he?' Julia pursued. 'It seems so odd of him to come down here, and then go and put everyone into a book—even you, Josie!'

'Ah, ye read that one? Yes, I was murdered all right!' Mr. Walsh said, grinning cheerfully. He paused, and considered. 'Well, he's not a very good Cat'lic—he often misses Mass. When he's up in Dublin he goes around with all these clever lit'ry fellas—and that takes a man away from the Faith.'

'Why should that be?' Jamieson asked.

'Oh, these smart writers mostly have no religion—they don't believe in anything but themselves! Or in Russia,' the publican replied. "'Tis the thing among them to think the world of Russia. Isn't it the same in London, Miss Probyn?'

'I daresay, Josie. But how do you come to know so much about the Dublin writers?'

This was something Jamieson was longing to know too. He was both startled and fascinated to get this very positive slant on the Dublin literary scene in the smallest of possible pubs, in the wilds of Mayo.

Mr. Walsh hesitated before replying.

'Well now, Miss Probyn, you're an old friend, and a friend of very old friends. If I let you into a little secret you'll keep it to yourself? I've never told this even to Lady or the General.'

Julia reassured him. 'And Colonel Jamieson won't talk either.'

'Well Miss Probyn, I have a half-share in the Ailesbury Hotel in Dublin, and once in a while I go up to look into things. 'Tis very popular, is the Ailesbury; and the bar-man tells me what goes on.'

Julia almost gasped. She had only a rough idea of what a 'half-share' in the Ailesbury might be worth, but it must run into tens of thousands of pounds. And here was Josie, serving drinks behind his tiny bar in Oldport! But that was Ireland—she knew of at least two shopkeepers in Martinstown, also serving behind their counters, whose fortunes were fully three-quarters of a million each.

'That's most interesting,' she said. 'Of course we won't say a

word. But Josie, *why* are all these writers so keen on Russia? How much of a Commie is Mr. MacMahon?

"'Commie'!"—that's a great expression,' Mr. Walsh said. 'See now, Miss Probyn, for these boys everything Russian is right, and everything Christian is wrong. That's the way it is'

'But do they *do* anything for Russia?'

'I think it's little enough they do, except writing and prating about it,' Mr. Walsh said. 'And the Censorship clamps down on their books.'

'Mr. MacMahon's novels aren't particularly lefty,' Julia said thoughtfully. 'They're just thrillers.'

'Ah, he's too cute to put himself in wrong with the Censors—he has a family to feed! But if he could do Russia a good turn on the quiet, he would, right enough—like the rest of them.'

This was disconcerting. Suppose the novelist got himself invited to come out to the Island in the O'Hara's boat, Julia thought—that would really tear it. The idea prompted her to put a blunter question than she usually ventured on in Mayo. After a comment on Mr. MacMahon's political views she said, leaning confidentially across the counter—

'Josie, what happened to the General's boat?'

Mr. Walsh also leaned across, so far that his curly iron-grey head almost touched her golden one.

'Miss Probyn, the lads had her out one night, when Lady and the General was away; what they did to her I don't know, but anyway they had the engine busht someway.'

'How disgusting!' Julia said.

'Ah, 'twas a shame all right. They wanted to go out after the herring, and just took her.'

'How disgusting!' Julia repeated. 'Really, Josie, that was very wrong.'

'Ah, it was wrong all right.' A pause. 'But it wasn't a sin,' Mr. Walsh added with great definiteness. Jamieson, brought up in the traditions of John Knox, was fairly thrown back on his haunches by this singular ethical outlook.

'But didn't Tom Grady hear the engine when they took her out?' Julia asked.

'He was away that evening too—old Mrs. Tom Billy was sick, and he'd gone for the praste. He was raging mad after, when he heard what happened.'

How typical, Julia thought. She had now been staying in Rostrunk for thirty-six hours; there had been endless discussion about what had gone wrong with the boat—but it was clear that Tom Grady, Michael's loved and trusted 'herd', had withheld the truth from his master. Julia was not surprised; but as often in Ireland, she was rather shocked. What was it Father Murphy had once said to Helen? 'Ah, Lady, if Mother Church had known the Irish, She'd have made lying one of the Seven Deadly Sins!'

Presently they paid, and left. Driving back—'Well, obviously it's no good waiting for Michael's boat,' Julia said. 'We shall just have to take the mail boat from Roonagh, and stay in the pub. Probably better, really; we shouldn't have had much time to hunt round on short day trips, and with other people on our tail all the while.'

Miss Probyn's use of the word 'we' was balm to Colonel Jamieson. No need to ask if she would come with him; she meant to.

'What's the pub like?' he asked.

'Oh, rather sweet. There are basins in the bedrooms, and if there's any water at all, it's hot. And the food's quite good; Mrs. O'Malley has an Aga.'

'Why should there sometimes be no water?'

'Oh, if there's been a drought, or if the wind-pump isn't working. We'd better ring up from Rostrunk and see when we can get rooms.'

What a blessed girl, the Colonel thought. But all he said was—'Oh, is the Island on the telephone? How convenient.'

'Well no, not exactly—in fact one telegraphs. There's some kind of wireless machine, like they have in Australia in the Out-Back; and Mrs. O'Malley sits and works sort of bicycle-pedals. She's the post mistress as well, you see.'

This was another glimpse of what the Colonel was coming to regard as the fantasy of life in the West of Ireland. Black Magic and private radio-communication, it all came alike to them! But his relations with Julia pressed more heavily on him than Irish peculiarities. Philip Jamieson was deeply conventional, and since he had decided to make Julia his wife if he could, her reputation had become a matter of great importance to him. He cogitated for some time as to how to put his next question.

'How shall you explain to the O'Haras that you are coming

to the Island with me?' he asked at last. 'Do they think you are interested in fulmars?'

'Oh goodness no! I shall just say that I think you'd better have someone to help you out, in this foreign land, so I'm going too.'

'Will the General accept that explanation? Do you suppose this MacMahon man talked to him about my being in M.I.5 after we'd gone?' the Colonel asked rather anxiously.

'More than likely—if Michael tackles you about it you'll have to decide for yourself whether to say Yes or No. Of course he knows, or did know, that I've been involved with Colin, but luckily he forgets a great deal. Anyhow he's become conditioned to accept pretty well anything I do. The one thing Michael worries about is morals, and he knows I'm completely moral,' the girl added blandly, without the slightest change of colour. It was the man who blushed.

At Rostrunk they again had drinks in the beautiful library. Presently Julia said—'Michael, could I get onto the pub on Clare Island? Colonel Jamieson wants to get out there as soon as possible; and he thinks he'd better stay, so as to have more time for these birds.'

'I can take him over in a day or two,' General O'Hara said. 'The boat will be all right by then.'

'Are you sure she will? Anyhow we want to go at once.'

The General, who occasionally used an eyeglass, now placed this in his eye and fixed it on Miss Probyn in a cold stare.

'Who are "we", Julia?' he asked.

'Me and the Colonel. I'm going too, to show him round.'

'Oh, what a *good* idea!' Lady Helen said, from the depths of a leather armchair. 'Clare Island is such a strange place, and you know it so well. Do go and telegraph, dearest.'

Julia went through into the gun-room and used the telephone.

'Oh Rosie, Miss Probyn here. Listen—could you send a message to Mrs. O'Malley on Clare Island, and ask the soonest date she'd have two rooms free? For me and a friend—and then ring me back.'

'I'll do that, Miss Probyn. 'Tis nice you're with us again.'

'Lovely to be here, Rosie.'

In the library another conversation was going on. Lady Helen saw that the idea of this expedition was fretting her husband—he

fidgited about, asking where the Scotch whisky was, and why there was no soda? She dealt with everything in turn, in her usual calm manner.

'I thought it might amuse Colonel Jamieson to drink Irish whiskey for a change,' she said. 'But if you hate it, Colonel, do say, and you shall have Scotch and soda instead.'

The Colonel said that he rather liked Irish whiskey.

'Oh, excellent. Now Michael darling,' General O'Hara's wife went on serenely, 'I'm going to ask something very difficult of you.'

'What's that?' he asked, startled.

'To grow up, the least little bit; I mean to be in the faintest degree *au courant* with contemporary life. You're all upset because Julia is going to stay on the Island with Colonel Jamieson, to help him—but nowadays that is common form; it means nothing.'

'Tisn't the sort of thing that used to be done when I was young,' the General said gruffly.

'No, my darling—but you see you're not young any more.' She gave a soft laugh. 'Everything is quite different today. Do stop worrying, and have another whiskey—and don't say a word to Julia. Promise?'

Rather grudgingly, the General promised. It was a fine question whether he or Jamieson was the more embarrassed by Lady Helen's open tackling of the matter; but Jamieson, at least, was immensely relieved.

The General did pour himself another drink, and then turned to his guest with a question.

'That fellow MacMahon said you're in M.I.5,' he pronounced. 'Are you?'

'I am connected with Intelligence, certainly,' Jamieson replied rather stiffly—'but I should be interested to know how your neighbour became aware of the fact, and why he should wish to publicise it. His Communist leanings, perhaps?'

'Michael, I always told you that Tony was a parlour pink, and you never would believe me,' Lady Helen said. She held out her glass. 'Another little suppeen, please.'

'Helen, you don't need any more.'

'Oh you grudging creature! I *do*.'

Reluctantly, the General refilled his wife's tumbler.

'What makes you think Tony MacMahon is pro-Russian?' he asked Jamieson then.

'We learn things from all sorts of people,' the Colonel said.

The General reflected.

'That's not so nice, having a Communist here on the Bay,' he said at length. He considered again. 'Are these birds a blind? Are you after something else?' he asked.

Here the Colonel lied, coolly and deliberately.

'No. I'm going to Clare Island to watch fulmars,' he said—'whatever your Bolshevik neighbour may choose to think.' He wished that Julia was there to take a hand in this; he realised already that if they made any sort of enquiries on the Island the story would be all over Mayo in a matter of hours.

'Oh. Well you see young Colin, Julia's cousin, is in the Secret Service too—not much good at it, I shouldn't think—but anyhow I gather she often helps him out. Did quite a smart job in Switzerland a year or two ago, I heard.'

'Really? How interesting,' the Colonel said.

Fortunately at this moment Julia reappeared.

'The most marvellous piece of luck!' she said. 'Mrs. O'Malley has had a cancellation, and we can have two rooms tomorrow. So I shall be leaving you for a day or two, dear Helen.'

'Pity you couldn't wait for my boat to take you over,' the General said.

'Oh, we'll go from Roonagh—though thanking you all the same, Michael.'

'They can't miss this chance, darling,' Lady Helen said to her husband. 'It's extraordinary to get rooms at this time of year, with no notice at all.' The General grunted.

Julia went out with Jamieson to the car. The rooks were wheeling and cawing above the sycamores where they had nested; from the open kitchen windows came the drone of voices in prayer—the maids were saying the Rosary.

'Can you come out and pick me up here tomorrow at a quarter to ten?' Julia asked. 'The boat goes at eleven, or thereabouts.'

'I'll do that,' Jamieson said. He gave a glance at his companion, who had turned to gaze up at the wheeling rooks with an expression of calm pleasure; a late ray from the westering sun lit up her lion-gold hair, as it was gilding the heavy leaves of the sycamores. He caught hold of her hand.

'Bless you for making all this so easy,' he said.

'I thought that was the object of the exercise,' said Julia.

Chapter 9

JULIA turned back into the house in a very happy frame of mind. Helen had obviously done whatever was necessary with Michael to smooth their path to Clare Island. She crossed the hall, conscious, as she always was, of the graceful line of the curving staircase, the beauty of the oval walls and dome. Lovely house! In the library she found her hostess, rearranging the flowers on a table in the corner.

'Michael's gone to get his bath—he loves to wallow,' Lady Helen said. 'Have another drink, Julia.'

'I don't think I need it. We had to drink for ages with Josie to get the low-down on Tony MacMahon's background.'

'Oh, that's why you were so late. Of course, Josie knows everything; though *how*, I can't think.'

'Contacts in Dublin,' Julia said.

'Ah. Well anyhow, have another little drinkie, darling, I want to talk about backgrounds. We've plenty of time.'

'Tony's?' Julia asked, pouring herself a small gin.

'No, your *very* delightful friend's. Tony seems to know rather a lot, too.'

'Oh? What did he say?' Julia was only thinking in terms of M.I.5, and was quite unprepared for what followed.

'He said "It's so sad about poor Susan". And when I asked who in the world poor Susan might be he said—"Oh, didn't you know? That man Jamieson's wife. She's a dipsomaniac, and has to be shut up in a home." Did *you* know, Julia?'

'No,' Julia said—the one syllable was strangely prolonged. After it she remained silent, wondering if this appalling news could be true?—and if it was, why he had at least not behaved as though he were free, and beginning to love her. Her mind ran over their recent conversations. He hadn't *said* anything very definite, except his irritation that very afternoon about poor Professor Burbage's 'silliness' coming between them, and putting her in a cleft stick. But his whole manner had been that of a lover free to love—and in this bitter moment she knew, quite

certainly, that she loved him completely.

But she had to say something to Helen, who also remained silent, her dark eyes fixed on a portrait above the fireplace.

'I'm not sure that I put much reliance in anything Tony MacMahon says,' the girl remarked, still speaking rather slowly.

'He was right about M.I.5, wasn't he?' Lady Helen remarked, reaching out to a silver box and lighting another cigarette. 'You never told *us* that, darling.'

'No—why should I? Nearly all my boy-friends seem to be in M.I.5,' Julia said—she was beginning to recover herself. 'That's thanks to Colin—the Secret Service is really my first cousin once removed! But one doesn't advertise the fact—they don't like it.'

Lady Helen gave her low laugh.

'I see that. Have you any special reason for mistrusting Tony?'

'Only his being a Commie, and his general irresponsibility. *Imagine* his putting you and Michael, in a book, when you'd been so good to him. But thank you for telling me.'

'Dearest, I hope he really is only on appro, as you said,' Lady Helen observed.

'Yes, that's all,' Julia lied blandly. 'But I can easily find out if Master Tony is telling the truth or not.'

'How? Oh, your Mrs. Hathaway, I suppose.'

'Yes.' Julia realised how little she relished the idea of writing to her dear Mrs. H. to put this particular enquiry; all the same she must do it—and did that very night, before she fell into an uneasy sleep.

The horrid thought of 'poor Susan' gnawed at her the following day, when she and Jamieson drove through Martinstown and down the southern shore of Clew Bay. She had decided, in the helpful daylight of a summer morning, to hold her hand where Philip Jamieson was concerned till she got the answer to her letter; but she was disturbed and unhappy, and to dispel her unhappiness she spoke about local matters. As they passed the foot of Croagh Patrick she told Jamieson of the great annual pilgrimage, when tens of thousands of people from all over the world stumble more than two thousand feet up the stony track to the summit, and receive Communion, kneeling on the rough ground, from midnight till noon.

'Of course the local Prots take a dim view of it,' she said. 'There was a sweet old man who used to live just down there'—

she pointed towards the sea, on her right. 'Helen suggested to him once that she and Michael might go over for drinks before lunch the next Sunday. The old boy, who used that wonderful eighteenth-century form of speech—it's dying out now—said No. "On *Saturday* there commences a species of Saturnalia, which continues until *Sunday* afternoon." Helen guessed what he meant and said—"Oh, the Croagh Patrick Pilgrimage! It begins at the Abbey, doesn't it?" There's an old ruined Abbey down by the sea. But the old fellow said—"Lady Helen, the pilgrimage begins at the public-house—and *ends* there!"'

'Are they really as bitter as that?' Jamieson asked, though he could not help laughing.

'Oh yes—religion in Ireland is all politics. Two opposed races, two opposed religions. Christian charity gets pretty well squeezed out, on both sides.'

They drove on down to Roonagh Point. A narrow road led through a stretch of coastal country, remarkable for its solitude, and for the exquisite limpidity of the light that lay on sea and land, under the pale Atlantic sky. At Roonagh, on a small stone-built quay in a sheltered cove, several curraghs, the long canvas-built boats of Ireland's western sea-board, were drawn up, looking, with their black tarred bottoms, like enormous sleeping serpents. But there was no sign of the mail-boat, not even on the three-mile stretch of blue water between them and the harbour on Clare Island, now plainly visible—a long sea-wall, a grey castle, and some houses grouped round a small bay.

'She's late,' Julia said.

Jamieson wanted to know where to put the car.

'Oh, get the luggage out here, and leave her up in one of the old kelp-sheds.' Jamieson did as he was told, and parked in one of several open-fronted stone buildings. Julia looked out towards the Island again.

'What can be going on? Give me your glasses.' She lay down on the short turf, thickly studded with daisies—the air was full of their faint scent—adjusted the field-glasses to her short-sighted eyes, and propped on her elbows, examined the harbour.

'There isn't a soul about,' she pronounced. 'What day is it? Can they all be at Mass? I'll try the Abbey.' She shifted the field-glasses slightly to the left, where about a mile beyond the harbour a large modern Church stood close to the ruins of a mediaeval Abbey.

'There's a terrier—yes, and a spaniel—on the Church steps,' she said then. 'I bet you it is some Saint's Day, and everyone's at Mass. The mail-van isn't here either. We must just wait.' She lit a cigarette, but at intervals continued to study the Island through Jamieson's binoculars.

'The dogs are getting up,' she announced presently. 'Ah, here they come!' The Zeiss glasses showed a dark crowd of people emerging from the Church and streaming along the white road towards the harbour. 'Not so long now.'

And in half an hour they saw a dinghy pull out from the harbour towards a stout chunky motor-boat, which chugged across towards them, and tied up at the quay.

'How are you, Mr. O'Malley?' Julia asked of one of the men who stepped ashore.

'Great, Miss Probyn—how's yourself? So you're coming back to see us on the Island again—that's good.'

'This is Colonel Jamieson,' Julia said—both the men from the boat shook hands with the stranger.

'Jimmy, see if the mailbag is up in the shed,' Mr. O'Malley said. While Jimmy went up and returned with a rather small mailbag—Clare Island has only about a hundred and thirty houses—Mr. O'Malley apologised for the delay. 'Were ye waiting long, Miss Probyn? Today is a Holy Day.'

'Never mind, Martin.'

'There's four cases for the hotel up in it,' the man called Jimmy now observed. 'Give me a hand down with them, Mairtin—they're heavy.'

'That will be the booze, and our tinned soup and tinned fruit,' Julia said to Jamieson. When all the cargo for the Island was stowed, the boat shot away.

As so often in the last forty-eight hours, Jamieson was surprised—now by the O'Malley Hotel. Though very small indeed it was extremely neat, clean, and decently furnished, even the two minute bedrooms in which their luggage was bestowed. Julia, after being greeted with warmth by Mrs. O'Malley, asked 'How are you off for water?'

"Oh, fine. We had great rains this season."

In the little dining-room a very young girl served them with lamb chops and kidneys on mashed potato, plus grilled tomatoes; followed, naturally, by Californian tinned peaches,

but also by a quite excellent baked custard.

'Eat away now—you'll only get high tea this evening,' Julia adjured her companion. The very young girl sidled up to her and asked shyly, in a voice hardly above a whisper—'Mrs. O'Malley wants to know, would ye care for crayfish to your tea?' ~~to~~

'Oh yes, *please*—and a lettuce. I see she has some in the garden. Thank you, Bernadette.'

'And will ye be taking coffee?'

'Tell Mrs. O'Malley, yes if it's Nes; if not, tea.' The girl called Bernadette went away, giggling softly. She had the dark hair, creamy-white complexion, and grey eyes set in a smudge of dark eyelashes supposed to be typical of Irish girls, but in fact rather rare; in the West red or mouse-brown hair are more usual.

'What a lovely creature,' Jamieson said.

'Yes, isn't she?' But Miss Probyn had other matters on her mind—principally the course their enquiries were to take. Julia had a rather remarkable capacity for detaching her mind from her own concerns, and switching it onto the job in hand; she did so now. She was sufficiently familiar with the Island to realise that two people might easily spend three weeks covering the ground carefully enough to find what they were looking for, unless they had some indications to help them. When Bernadette brought the Nescafé she asked—

'Is Mr. O'Malley still in the bar, or could I have a word with him? If he's busy, maybe I could see the Mistress?'

'What are you after now?' Jamieson asked.

'To find out if old Charlie Ruddy is still alive—I forgot to ask Helen. He's practically the oldest inhabitant, and knows everything that goes on; he's frightfully good value, if he hasn't gone gaga meantime.'

'Do you mean you propose to ask him about this?' Jamieson looked rather horrified.

'Oh well, throw a line over him, and see if he rises. We must get any help we can.'

The landlord presently appeared; a regular O'Malley, with curly black hair, a red beard, and a big beak of a nose. After the usual introduction and greetings—'Mr. O'Malley, is old Charlie Ruddy still going strong?' Julia asked.

'He is that, Miss Probyn—and as cute as ever!'

'Oh, I am glad. I thought we might look in on him this afternoon

on our way to that Stack beyond the Tower—that's full of birds.'

'Miss Probyn, I was thinking—will you and the gentleman want to walk all that length in this heat? Wouldn't you be the better of Pat O'Malley's side-car?'

'Yes, we would,' Julia replied promptly. 'How soon can he have it ready?'

'He has it before the house now, Miss Probyn.'

'Fine.' She laughed as she ran up the steep narrow stairs; the landlord had fixed all this in advance, of course. On the little landing Jamieson accosted her. 'Is everyone on this island called O'Malley?'

'A lot of them. It was one of Old Grace's great strongholds—you must see her castle tomorrow or sometime. She's supposed to be buried in the Abbey—you must see that too.'

'Who was Old Grace?' the man asked, following her down the stairs.

'Granuaile—Grania-ni-Mhaille, Grace O'Malley, the legendary heroine of Irish freedom. I'll tell you about her sometime. Come on now.'

The Irish side-car, now almost extinct, is one of the least comfortable vehicles imaginable. The driver sits easily four-square behind the horse, but the passengers perch on two long seats with a high back between them, parallel with the direction of the vehicle—and since side-cars are now never used except on very rough roads, they are jerked about, clinging to the back between the seats. Julia was accustomed to this, and placed herself diagonally, with one elbow over the high back; she urged her companion to do the same, bracing his feet against the floorboard. After that she enjoyed the drive. The hot sunshine lay hazy over the high hill in front of them, the sky was full of lark-song; the small fields on either side of the white road smelt sweet, and were amazingly clean and free from weeds—'Look, there's hardly a dock or a buchelaun in them, and no foxgloves on the banks.'

'What on earth is a buchelaun?'

'Ragwort.'

Pat proudly pointed out the Abbey—would they look at it?

'Not today, Pat—we want to get on to the Stack and see the birds, and have a talk to old Charlie, if he's about.'

Jamieson had been using his eyes on his surroundings. After climbing a slope up from the harbour on the sheltered eastern

side, their road was now skirting the western shore, open to the Atlantic; here was where he would expect to find what he was looking for. The coastline was deeply indented by cliffy inlets, with projecting headlands between them—he realised that it would take hours and days to cover them all. Julia was right; they would need any help they could get.

About a mile and a half beyond the Abbey a tall stone tower rose into view ahead of them—but before he could ask what it was Julia pointed down to the left.

‘There’s the Doon—the best of all the headland forts.’

A spectacular tongue of land, surrounded by perpendicular cliffs, here projected into the ocean, with a deep chasm on one side; Jamieson thought he could just detect the outline of the fort itself, and three defence walls on the landward side, all grassed over.

‘And there’s old Charlie, by gum!’ said Pat. ‘Will ye go on to the Tower, or will ye stop and speak with him?’

‘Oh, we’ll stop. You go on to the farm.’

Pat got down and held the horse’s head while Julia and Jamieson clambered off the side-car. They walked across some close-grazed pastures to a turf bank on which sat a most magnificent old man. He was dressed all in black—for Mass, of course—and had an immense white beard; a sheepdog sat at his feet, a long staff rested against the bank at his side, a flock of sheep grazed near him. The perfect example of the pastoral patriarch, Jamieson thought as they approached and Ruddy used his staff to hoist himself to his feet—he was very tall, and his big-featured face was noble and intelligent.

‘Mr. Ruddy, how are you?’ Julia said. ‘It’s good to see you again.’

‘It’s good that you’ve come back to visit us, Miss Probyn,’ the old man replied, wringing her hand. ‘Or did you get married?’ he asked, with a glance at Jamieson.

‘No, no—still Miss Probyn!’ Julia said gaily, though with a knock at her heart. ‘This is my friend Colonel Jamieson,’ she went on. ‘I’ve brought him over to see the Island and the birds.’

‘Is it in Rostrunk you are? How is the General?—and Lady?’

Jamieson was struck during the conversation which followed by the beautiful quality of the Island speech—there was no trace here of the rough burr and slurred vowels of the mainland. Julia

enquired about Mr. Ruddy's daughter, who kept house for him, then after the well-being of his sheep; she learned that the wire fence along the top of the cliffs at the northern end of the island was 'rotted away altogether', so that the sheep went down the cliffs and sometimes fell—Charlie had lost four quite recently. 'Every day I do be through the cliffs myself, clapping and whistling them out of it. I brought them down here today, to have some peace while I was at Mass.'

Jamieson had not yet seen 'the cliffs', an almost vertical drop of eleven hundred feet; when he did, he was as aghast as Julia now was at the idea of this old man of over eighty going 'through them'—i.e. along the narrow ledges—to 'whistle and clap' his greedy animals back to safety. But he listened carefully to Julia's talk with Mr. Ruddy; clearly they were on the best of terms, and if enquiries must be made, she could not have chosen a better person.

At last the girl came to it—as cautiously, as casually, as she could.

'Mr. Ruddy, has there been anything odd seen on the Island lately? Some sort of wireless apparatus? I don't mean Mrs. O'Malley's machine in the Post Office, of course. Someone mentioned it, and I wondered if it was true.'

'Now it's funny you should have heard of that already. You'll be meaning these little blue-and-white wireless masts, that pop up and then go down again?' Julia nodded, delighted, though she preserved her usual calm expression. 'Yes, there's two of them in it,' Mr. Ruddy pursued—'One on the Doon, and one up on the top. But 'tis only four or five weeks since they started up.'

'What are they for?' Julia asked.

'Ah, 'tis the French crabbers that put them in. Now they can radio to Paris, or wherever 'tis, when they have a good catch of crabs, and a trawler comes across to pick them up—with refrigeration on board.'

'How clever,' Julia said blandly. Jamieson's eyes were almost starting out of his head at this novel explanation of the object of his search—for what else could a blue-and-white aerial be?

'Do you get many foreign trawlers in here?' Julia went on.

'No, only the Frenchmen, bad luck to them! Wait now-- there was a Swedish boat in it a while back, with three fellas on board, but she didn't wait very long, only two-three days. She

wasn't a trawler—just a motor-boat, like the mail-boat.'

'Funny, Swedes coming here,' Julia commented carelessly, though in fact she was greatly interested by this information. 'Mr. Ruddy, I'd love to see the French crabbers' wireless. Whereabouts on the Doon is it?'

'In the old Danish fort, right on the point,' Charlie replied. Mayo country-people always describe any ancient forts, pre-historic or not, as 'Danish', the Danish raids being still a lively folk-memory; in many cases the Danes built a fort over the pre-historic one.

'Let's go down and look, shall we?' Julia said to Jamieson. 'What fun!'

'Ah, I'll be here a while yet. But there's not much to see, unless the wireless stick comes up—just a kind of a glass bowl; I can't know what that's for—'twill be part of the machinery.'

Julia and Jamieson knew well enough the purpose of the 'glass bowl'. As they walked down towards the headland fort Jamieson said—'This is quite splendid. If that marvellous old man says there are only two, I bet he's right.'

'Oh yes—Charlie knows everything. I told you that.'

Jamieson would have liked to be able to devote more time and attention to the fort itself. It had three turf-built walls on the landward side, and the circular rampart of the fort proper; in this they came on exactly what they expected to find—the plastic cover over the main installation, the metal socket for the wireless aerial, and newly-cut sods covering the batteries.

'Don't lift those,' Julia said. 'Charlie will be watching our every movement, and he still has eyes like a hawk. Talk about your fulmars when we go back—we must have some cover.'

'Yes—right.' Jamieson had pulled out his prismatic compass, and was taking bearings; he scribbled these down in his notebook. 'You've handled this splendidly, Julia,' he said. 'But how are we to find the other one?'

'We'll leave that till tomorrow—it's too late today. I bet Pat knows exactly where it is—if not we'll get Charlie to show us. Obviously all this is common knowledge.'

'That's what is so extraordinary,' Jamieson said, as they walked back uphill towards the dark figure of Mr. Ruddy seated on the turf bank. 'They know the facts, and yet have made a completely imaginary interpretation of them.'

'You're in Ireland,' Julia reminded him.

'So ye found it all right—I saw ye got to the very spot,' the old man said.

'Yes. I do wish we could see the aerial go up—did you say it was blue and white?'

'Tis. I can't know why.' Jamieson was struck by the repetition of the phrase 'I can't know', obviously meaning 'I don't know'. But he dutifully turned the conversation onto the subject of Fulmars. Would he see them on the big Stack beyond the Tower?

'Aye, and up in the cliffs of the Bank; 'tis there they nest mostly. Many come to see them, since they came in a few years back. I'm hearing an Englishman, a great expairt, wrote a book on them; I saw him when he was in it—a small darkish fella, very pleasant.'

Jamieson said he had read the book; that was what had brought him to Clare Island. Mr. Ruddy replied that for his part he wished it was the grouse that had come back, rather than 'these foolish birds sailing in and out of the cliffs.'

The Colonel's interest was at once aroused by this. Had there been grouse on the Island? he asked.

'Aye, one time 'twas full of them. When I was a boy, in the spring the young birds would be running like chickens in the hill. I used to go fowling with the praste, Father Tom Haley. When the fog would be in on the hill, we'd go.'

'But are there none now?'

'Divil a one.'

'And why did they leave?' Jamieson, like all Scotsmen, was much interested in the curious migrations of grouse, and their inexplicable disappearances and reappearances. What Mr. Ruddy now told him, however, was something quite outside his experience.

''Twas this way. There was one Macdonnell was agent to Sir Samuel O'Malley, that owned the Island. He used to bring parties of gentlemen in the autumn to shoot, and 'twas reported to him—I never knew who it was that done it—that the praste was shooting the grouse. So one day, after he had been shooting, Mr. Macdonnell sent a pair of grouse to the praste. Father Haley took the birds, and gave the old man that brought them two or three taps on the back with them, and he said—"Take them

back to him, and tell him, 'When he'll see them again, he'll shoot them.' And after that the grouse disappeared away altogether out of it.'

Jamieson was rather aghast at the implications of this story.

'The grouse left that very year?' he asked.

'Aye, the same year. They're never been in it since.'

Julia, familiar with West Mayo, was not in the least aghast; she was delighted. The curious form of the priest's curse—'When he'll see them again, he'll shoot them'—was in the best old tradition of 'riddle-talk'; serious threats, such as the curse which drove away the grouse, always had to be made in an ambiguous form, as she explained later to Jamieson.

'Oh, like the curse of the Kennedys. "And I will not be praying that you will have no one to come after you in your place". Yes, we have that in the Highlands too.'

This conversation took place over high tea in the little hotel, eating an enormous crayfish accompanied by toast, home-made butter, and a fresh lettuce out of Mrs. O'Malley's garden, which Julia insisted on dressing herself.

'Well that was a splendid meal,' Jamieson said, pushing back his chair and stretching out his legs; he had asked for Guinness, but Julia, at home with the local habits, drank several cups of strong tea. 'Do we have coffee in the other room?'

'Yes.'

The little sitting-room was already occupied by a small couple, the other residents in the hotel; they were short, squat, and blond, with pale blue eyes and snub noses; when Julia gave them the customary courteous greeting they replied in broken English. The girl unhesitatingly asked them where they came from—they proved to be Czechs, and explained that they had come to Clare Island to see the famous fulmars.

'Oh yes. Of course you wouldn't have them at home—Maritime Bohemia was an invention of Shakespeare's,' Julia said cheerfully. The woman smiled politely; the man frowned.

'We no longer speak of Bohemia; we speak of Czecho-Slovakie,' he said rather gruffly.

'Oh really.' But Julia's suspicions of foreigners were easily roused that summer; when they had drunk their coffee she suggested to Jamieson that they should take a stroll. Outside, in the warm July evening, as they pottered round the harbour on the

white dusty road she said: 'I don't like those people—I wish they weren't here.'

'I never like Czechs anywhere,' the Colonel replied—'except poor Jan Masaryk.'

'Well look,' Julia said, 'I'd laid Pat and the side-car on for ten tomorrow—do you think we'd better make it earlier? We don't a bit want these little Iron Curtain creatures up on the Bank with us, and Czechs are terrific walkers. How do you suppose they got leave to come out here, anyhow? And *why*?'

'For no good reason, I'll be bound—certainly not fulmars! Where does Pat live?'

'Up the road—but I expect he'll be in the bar now. Let's try that first.'

The bar of the O'Malley Hotel—which opened off the road at a respectable distance from the main entrance through the garden—was crowded when they went in. A small man seated on the bar itself, swinging his legs, hailed Julia as she entered with—'Well, sweetheart, what do you think of the Sterling Area?'

'If you are addressing me,' Julia replied coldly, 'I think the same of it as I have thought all my life—I was born here.'

Mr. O'Malley applied his inn-keeper's tact.

'Doctor, you're making a mistake. Miss Probyn isn't an American; she's been coming to the Island for years.'

The little American jumped down, shook hands with Julia, and apologised nicely.

'Okay,' Julia said. She looked round. 'Oh, Pat, would you come outside for a moment?' Out in the road, smelling of dust and flowers, she arranged for the side-car to meet them half an hour earlier—then she went back into the bar, where to promote good feeling she and Jamieson each had a whiskey. Heads turned after Julia's tawny loveliness all the time, but she managed to get in a word with the landlord about their fellow-guests. 'How long have that little foreign couple been here?' she asked.

'Twill be a month now, or a bit more.'

'Are they Catholics?' Julia asked skilfully.

'Well, they be's at Mass every Sunda.'

'And what do they do?'

'Watching birds and picking flowers, mostly,' the landlord replied.

'How nice.' Julia put her next question in a roundabout fashion.

'It was grand to find old Charlie in such great shape,' she said. 'Wonderful old man, he is.'

'Ah, he is that. Pat told me ye had speech of him.'

'Yes. I was so glad. Charlie told me about these funny wireless things that the French crabbers have put in,' she pursued. 'We went and looked at one. And did you see those three Swedish men who came in a motor-boat? Charlie was speaking of them too.'

'Aye, they were in here. Nasty sour fellas, to my way of thinking.'

'Oh, I thought Swedes were supposed to be so nice—their King going about in trams, and all that sort of thing.'

'Well these boys weren't Kings, and they grumbled at the price of their drinks,' Mr. O'Malley said vexedly. 'Slept on the boat, too.'

'Oh, how horrid,' Julia said. 'But perhaps you wouldn't have had room for them all, if the Czechs were here when they came?'

'They *brought* them!' the landlord replied. 'Dumped them here on me! And they never buy a drink, don't that pair. 'Tis just coffee, coffee, coffee—the wife is killt out making it, and all these packed lunches every day! Cutting sandwiches is a slow job—and with good food ready in the house,' he added indignantly. 'Tis ham or tongue they want always, and look at the price of those things!'

Julia expressed her usual easy sympathy.

'How terribly tiresome for Mrs. O'Malley. But why on earth do they stay so long? They've had time to *count* the fulmars by now, and to pick *every* flower on the Island, I'd have thought.'

Mr. O'Malley laughed at Julia's crack about the Czechs counting the fulmars, but he had to refill the glasses of several of his thirsty customers at that point; the little American doctor seized the opportunity of talking to her again—evidently he had overheard her conversation with the landlord.

'I don't believe those Czechs care a dime for birds or flowers,' he said, in a low tone. 'I'm a stand-in for the local doctor, who's on holiday, and I'm all over the Island every day, so I see a lot. They spend most of their time watching these wireless installations, and logging the times when the aerials go up—I've seen them often, writing in little books.'

'But why should Czechs be interested in French crabbers' reports?' Julia asked innocently.

'Oh, French crabbers nothing! That just shows how silly people can get.'

'I'm not sure that I understand,' Julia said.

'Well let me tell you. I'm sorry I was so brash when you came in,' the American said, 'but I don't want anyone to pull the wool over your lovely eyes. You're British, I take it?'

'Yes.'

'Well, come outside.' Julia, glass in hand, followed the American out into the warm road. 'These wireless installations are Communist ones; those three types calling themselves Swedes, that Mr. O'Malley doesn't care for all that, put them in—I actually saw them digging on the Doon, very late one night; I stayed and watched.'

'Not really?'

'Yeas. It was a calm evening, with a full moon, and when they'd dug the holes they brought their motor-boat round and carried the machinery up from the sea, and stamped the sods in over it.'

'Gracious!' Julia said. 'Why do you think they weren't really Swedes?'

'They were talking Russian. I was brought up on the old Polish border, and I speak Polish—so I can recognise Russian when I hear it. Those Czechs are just Communist spies, reporting home about how well the system works.'

Julia studied the little American's face in the faint late twilight.

'Why do you tell *me* this?' she asked.

'Because I was fresh with you—and you're so beautiful,' the American said simply.

'Does anyone else know what you saw?—those bogus Swedes digging the holes, I mean?'

'No—why should I tell anyone here? I don't worry about the Irish!—why had they to be so mean to the British about their bases? I'm a German Jew from the Bronx—name of Feinstein; and I do know that before the War little Britain, poor as she was, took in 78,000 refugees when the Nazis got going, while Ireland did nothing, and the U.S.A. next to nothing—just the big names like Einstein and Reinhold Niebuhr. That's made me pretty pro-British,' the little man said. 'I was lucky, and got over to America

early on; but lots of my relations got taken in by Britain when the States wouldn't have them.'

'But why do you think Britain needs to worry about Russian wireless installations out here?' Julia asked.

'Now listen! I have a friend in electronics, and I've had a look at this machinery; my guess is that its use is to track the course of space satellites dead accurately. So that when the satellites are used for dropping bombs—as they will be, presently—the bombs will be dropped accurately too.'

Julia was horrified, standing there in the sweet quiet of the July night; the scent of the flowers in Mrs. O'Malley's garden was borne on the soft air, the great stars stood high in heaven above the hill; very gently, the lapping of water on the sea-wall came to her ears. She thought of old Charlie and his sheep, and of all the quiet farms studding the Island; through the lighted windows of the little bar she could see the faces of country-people, enjoying their evening drink in company, after a day's hard work. It sickened her to think of bombs in connection with all this innocent, quiet, productive peace.


'Well?' the American said, as she remained silent.

'I was thinking.' She paused. 'And you haven't let anyone in England know about this?—since you're so pro-British?' she asked.

'Now look,' Feinstein protested—'how would I let anyone know from here? You can't telephone, and I'm pretty busy. Anyhow, I wouldn't know who to tell. I had thought of flying to London when Dr. MacGovern gets back—but now I've told *you*. Can't you use this?'

Julia was rather frightened by the question. Why should Dr. Feinstein think she could 'use' what he had told her?

'Oh, I've no idea,' she said, with studied vagueness. 'I'm not in touch with official people.'

'Well, if Britain wants this information, you've got it. Over to you,' the American said. 'Goodnight.' 

Chapter 10

JULIA did not at once return to the bar. It was rather a habit of hers, when confronted with some larger issue, to tackle small immediate things, and she walked round outside the hotel into the kitchen, where Mrs. O'Malley and Bernadette were having a last cup of tea, and posed the question of getting the Colonel's bedroom window to open—he had complained that it wouldn't.

'Ah, 'tis the new paint. Does he want it open tonight?'

'Yes, he does,' Julia said firmly.

'Bernadette, go see if John Thomas is in the bar—if he isn't, run down and ask him would he come up.' Bernadette vanished. 'Would you take a cup of tea, Miss Probyn?'

Julia put down her glass and accepted a cup of tea—a chat with the landlady might be useful.

'A lovely lunch, and a heavenly tea, Mrs. O'Malley,' she said. 'You *are* a good cook!'

'Was the gentleman pleased?'

'He was indeed.'

'Are ye marrying him, Miss Probyn? Ye'll forgive me for asking.'

This question, which up to yesterday evening had merely been a slight bore, had now become acutely painful. However, Julia managed to turn it off with a laugh.

'Who knows? I might one day, if he asked me.'

'He didn't ask ye yet? Now listen to me, Miss Probyn. He's the man for you—and he *will* ask you,' Mrs. O'Malley said, with profound conviction.

'Why should you think that?' the girl asked, as casually as she could.

'I see people—and I get to know them. He loves you, dear—and if I'm not a long way out, you love him too,' the landlady-cum-postmistress said. As so often, Julia's beautiful ripe-apricot blush betrayed her—it did not escape Mrs. O'Malley.

'Ah, I see I'm in the right of it! Well, God bless ye both. I

didn't think you'd be staying here with him, unless ye meant to marry him.'

'Thank you—how kind you are,' Julia said; she was at once touched, and profoundly embarrassed. All day she had been trying to forget about 'Susan', and in her concentration on their task she had occasionally succeeded. Now she was brought up against it all again. She turned the conversation.

'Tell me about this little American doctor who's here just now,' she said. 'I met him in the bar.'

'He's *clever*,' Mrs. O'Malley pronounced. 'He's doing great things for the people here—new medicines, and getting them away to Castlebar for operations. There's many that wish he would be in it always; he's so learned, as well as kind.'

Julia felt that one question at the back of her mind—was Dr. Feinstein a trustworthy person?—had been more or less answered. 'Clever', 'learned', and 'kind' were all pointers in a single direction.

At this point John Thomas appeared with a bag of tools, and they all went up to Jamieson's tiny bedroom, where with the help of a hammer and chisel the window was forced open at the bottom.

'Couldn't you make the top half open, Mr. O'Malley?' Julia asked. 'One gets better air that way.'

'No—the top is shtook completely,' John Thomas said, pushing in a small wooden wedge to hold the lower half of the window up. 'There now,—that'll have to do ye.'

Julia tried to pay; this was refused, but John Thomas consented to come down to the bar for a drink. The crowd was beginning to thin out, and when the carpenter had consumed his John Jamieson he said, wiping his lips—'Well, I'll be hoppin' along now, with the help o' God.'

Julia and Jamieson followed him out, after paying.

'Let's go down to the quay,' the girl said.

They strolled down the jetty. The mail-boat and one or two curraghs rocked gently at their moorings; otherwise the place was completely deserted. Julia sat down on a heap of bales of wool, piled up waiting for the wool-boat to take the Island's principal crop to the mainland, and reported to Jamieson what Dr. Feinstein had said to her.

'He actually saw those three pseudo-Swedes installing the plant?'

'Yes—and he constantly sees the Czechs jotting down the times when the aerals go up.'

'Wonder how reliable he is,' the Colonel speculated. Julia repeated Mrs. O'Malley's remarks.

'Hm'—yes, that doesn't sound bad. Why did he tell *you*?'

'He said, because he'd been rude to me, and I was British, and England had been so good about taking in Jewish refugees.'

There was a pause. Then—'I simply must get back to the mainland and report all this,' Jamieson said.

'You'll have to see the other installation first, won't you?'

'Yes, I suppose I must.' He considered. 'You say this little Yank Jew actually *told* you that the satellites were going to be used for dropping bombs?'

'That's what he said. Are they?'

'Of course,' Jamieson said thoughtlessly. 'But I wonder how the hell he knows.'

'He has a chum in electronics.'

'Well, we'd better go in. Of course I shall have to check on him, too. Let's get off early.'

Early starts are not easy to achieve in Ireland. Breakfast next morning, promised for nine sharp, appeared at twenty-past; Pat and his side-car, carefully settled for nine-thirty, appeared at ten minutes to ten. The Czechs had managed better; they were finishing their toast and coffee by the time the breakfast ordered by Julia appeared.

'You make an expedition?' the little woman asked.

'Yes—to see the fulmars.'

'Ah—we also.'

In all respects the Czechs managed things more cleverly than Julia and Jamieson. The shortest and quickest way to reaching the top of the cliffs at the northern end of Clare Island is to follow a track on the east side to the Lighthouse, whence a shorter, though steep climb takes one up to the long summit. But Pat took the way they had followed the previous day, along the western coast—he was dying to show them the Tower, let alone the Abbey. Julia, having learned from Old Charlie that the second installation was in fact on the western slope of the cliffs, agreed to that route, though she refused firmly to get out and look at the Tower.

'It was built as a look-out post for the Excise-men, so that they

could spot the smugglers' boats coming in to the south end of Achill Sound,' she said, in reply to a question of Jamieson's. 'All the wealthy Irish families used to employ their private smugglers to bring in brandy and tobacco from France—didn't they, Pat?'

'They did that, Miss Probyn,' Pat replied, laughing.

After stabling the mare at Tor Mor they struck inland and uphill to a high shoulder, whence they traversed across a steep grassy face to the cliffs; they pushed through the rusted and rotten strands of the decayed wire fence, and looked over the edge. The cliffs were broken both vertically and horizontally: vertically by deep clefts cutting into the land, horizontally by ledges anything from four to ten feet wide, covered with the rich grass which tempted Mr. Ruddy's sheep to their death. Here the fulmars were very much in evidence, skimming in and out, to and fro, across the wide chasms; some were clearly to be seen sitting on their nests. From the point of view of birds it was an impressive place. Gulls wailed; choughs, with their coral-pink feet, tumbled down through the air like black rags with a stone tied in them—a favourite play of the species; cormorants sat in upright groups, like politicians, on rocks in the sea.

Jamieson was careful to get out his binoculars and make some remarks to Pat about the fulmars; then he muttered to Julia in French—'Ask him where the doings are.'

'Pat, where's that wireless thing the French crabbers have put in up here?' Julia enquired. 'Mr. Ruddy told us about it.'

'Ah, 'tis a bit higher up.' Pat led them another hundred feet or more up to a point where a bluff projected further than usual from the main face of the cliffs.

'There ye are,' he said. 'What that glass bowl is for I can't know, but here's where the wireless mast comes out'—he placed his heavy country boot against the all-too-familiar metal socket.

'Oh, I wish I could see it!' Julia exclaimed. 'Old Charlie said it was blue and white—so odd.'

'Aye, 'tis. But ye never know when 'twill appear.'

'I'd like to check on these,' Jamieson muttered, this time in German. 'Can you deflect the chum's attention?'

Julia asked Pat to come with her to the lip of the cliff and hold her hand while she looked over—'I get giddy sometimes.' Most men, if invited to hold Julia's hand, readily did so, and Pat was no exception; while he held her long white hand tightly in his

rough brown one, she peered cautiously over the sheer rocky edge.

'Oh Pat, there is a sheep down there!' she exclaimed. 'See—to the left.'

'There is all right.' The Irishman let go of her hand, and to Julia's dismay scrambled down the cliff and proceeded to chase the foolish sheep along a horribly narrow ledge, till he and the dotty creature disappeared round the curve of the bluff. Julia stepped a pace or two away from the vertiginous edge, and looked up at Jamieson. He had been examining the instrument case and the batteries; as she watched he began to stack the turfs which concealed these back into position. But who were those two figures, bearing down on them from the highest point? One was a man, the other a woman, both so short and thickset that they could only be the Czechs—and from the slope above they must have seen everything. She forced herself to walk very slowly up to her companion.

'Here come the Commies,' she said. 'Don't look—but they'll certainly have seen all.'

'Damn! How the devil did they get there?' As he spoke Jamieson lit a cigarette, with elaborate casualness, before he glanced up the slope.

'Round by the Lighthouse, and over the top.'

'What a curse!' He walked slowly over to the edge of the cliff and began to focus his binoculars on the sea-birds.

'They must have seen what you were doing,' Julia repeated.

'Never mind—leave this to me.'

In a few moments the small couple came up to them—the man's face was quite flushed; he spoke irritably.

'So you do not only watch fulmars, Colonel Jamieson—you examine other things.'

'I beg your pardon?' Jamieson's voice and manner were equally cool.

'I saw you inspecting this installation!'

'Oh yes. How enterprising of the French fishermen to put in a radio here, to report their catches.'

The little Czech was caught completely off balance by this unexpected remark. The islanders would never have dreamt of mentioning their peculiar theories to these rather unacceptable aliens.

'The *French* fishermen, you say?' the little man asked.

'Yes, of course—the crab-catchers; they radio to Le Havre or somewhere, so that the refrigerator-boat can come across and take their catch back.'

The Czech burst out laughing—the relief in his expression was evident. At that moment Pat, driving the strayed sheep before him, appeared over the edge of the cliff above them.

'Oh, you got her!' Julia exclaimed. 'Good! Is she one of Charlie's?'

'Aye. The old fella will be pleased all right.'

The Central Europeans stared bewildered at this interchange.

'Pat, come and tell this foreign gentleman about the French crabbers' radio,' Julia said. 'All this time he's been on the Island' and he never seems to have heard of it.'

Pat explained. 'Mind you, we're not all that keen on the Frenchmen coming to catch our crabs and lobsters,' he ended—'but that's the way they work it. I bet that machinery costs a bit!'

They all perforce walked down together to Tor Mor, Pat driving the sheep in front of him. Old Charlie appeared at his door, and rather than feel obliged to give the Czechs a lift Julia accepted his offer of a cup of tea; she, Jamieson, and Pat went in and sat in the kitchen, while the Central Europeans stumped off along their homeward road.

'They're a kind of person we don't understand,' old Charlie said, when his daughter rebuked him for having failed in hospitality. 'They're in it a long time, but no one knows what they're after, and I can't understand their speech.'

'All the same, ye did wrong, Father. One should give a welcome to the stranger.'

'Well you're giving a welcome to us,' Jamieson said.

'Miss Probyn's no stranger here,' Miss Ruddy said firmly.

'And I come in on her apron-strings?' Jamieson replied, bringing a laugh to the rugged face.

'Ah, get on with ye! I see ye're one of those gets away with murther, with your clever tongue!'

'Now Bridie,' her father remonstrated. 'Keep a watch on your own tongue, as Blessed St. James said.'

Julia intervened.

'Mr. Ruddy, would you tell us the story of your grandfather

and Counsellor O'Malley? I'd like Colonel Jamieson to hear that.' She wanted to spin out the time, so as not to have to pick up the Czechs on the road.

The old man was delighted to oblige. When his grandfather was a young unmarried man Sir Samuel O'Malley's bailiff came to 'drive his cattle for the rent'—a common proceeding in Ireland in old days, as Julia knew.

'Charlie was reaping in the field with the hook when they went up to drive them, and he hung the hook round his neck and followed after, but he never went next or nigh them. When the bailiff saw my grandfather with the hook he was frightened, and he left the cattle and went to the police and said Charlie had tried to cut off his head with the hook. That night the police came and took Charlie from his bed in his mother's room, and away to the Castle—'twas the police bark' (old Charlie meant barrack) 'then; and they held him there for fourteen days and fourteen nights.'

Jamieson could not know that it was the custom in the past for unmarried sons to sleep in their parents' room; the phrase 'took him from his bed in his mother's room,' sounded unpleasantly like the Gestapo.

'What happened then?' he asked with deep interest.

'They had a trial, but they could bring no proof against him; so they let him out on bail till there would be a second trial. Charlie went to see a man called Counsellor O'Malley, a great man at the law; he lived on the mainland. So when Counsellor O'Malley heard all that he said to my grandfather—"Go back and tell that bailiff, if there's wool in his coat I'll have the wool out of it, if he brings another trial."' The splendid old man paused, and then repeated, with immense relish—"If there's wool in his coat, I'll have it out of it,"—that's what Counsellor O'Malley said.'

'And was there a second trial?' Jamieson asked.

'No, the bailiff let it be. Liameen (Small Billy) they called him. Eh, he was a proper little tyrant!'

Jamieson was fascinated by this story. He realised that what he was hearing was folk-lore in the making, recounted by someone in whom the oral tradition was still strong, uncontaminated by press or radio; Counsellor O'Malley's very words (like those of the curse which drove away the grouse) were being repeated

to him verbatim, halfway through the twentieth century—and in the shadow, almost, of two satellite-tracking stations. It was delightful; somehow it was comforting—Europe's beautiful, civilised past of traditions here still alive, still *growing*. He disliked the two little Czechs more than ever.

If it had been possible he would have liked to get back to the mainland that night, and post his report, but except on a Holy Day, nothing short of an earthquake would have persuaded Martin O'Malley to take the mail-boat across to Roonagh after the normal hours. The tempo of life in the West of Ireland is as relaxing as the climate, and as restful. After the midday meal the Colonel and Julia strolled out together and discussed their plans, as usual, on the bales of wool on the quay.


'All right, we'll leave tomorrow,' Julia said at length. 'Shall I tell Mrs. O'Malley you're feeling ill?'

'Can't you be feeling ill?'

'No, they all know I'm never ill. You can have a grumbling appendix. You go and write your report, and I'll get Mrs. O'M. to telegraph to Rostrunk and the Oldport Hotel to say we're coming back. Oh dear!—it is so nice here.' Clare Island had been in a way an escape; she dreaded facing even beloved Helen again, with this known wretchedness between them.

Colonel Jamieson was accustomed to using his portable typewriter in every sort of inconvenient situation—in his minute bedroom in the O'Malley Hotel he placed the machine on the bed on his despatch-case, and typed away at this improvised desk. His window, wedged open by John Thomas the previous evening, gave directly onto the quay beside the harbour, but he was wholly concentrated on his task, and when a sharp cry came in through the little opening he paid no attention to it. The cry was repeated, and now with words he heard: 'Help! Philip, help!'

This time he ran to the window. The jetty had deep water on the harbour side, but on the other a mixture of sand and rocks, only covered with shallow water at half-tide; it was half-tide now, but the curve of the jetty, and the pile of bales, prevented him from seeing the outer side to its farther end. What he did see was the two Czechs, in a dinghy, rowing quietly across the harbour towards the Castle. He called out sharply—'Julia! Where are you?'

'Down by the quay. Please come.' 

'Coming!' Jamieson shouted back. He tore the sheet he was at work on out of his typewriter, and locked it and the previous ones in his despatch-case before he left the room. As he raced down the little staircase he almost collided with Mrs. O'Malley.

'What happened Miss Probyn? I thought I heard her call out,' the landlady said anxiously.

'I'm going to see.'

'Oh, Holy Mother of God, let her not be hurt!' Mrs. O'Malley said.

Jamieson hastened along the quay. He could see that Julia was not in the water on the harbour side of the jetty, nor was she visible on the outer side, before the pile of bales cut off his view—when he reached these he called again. 'Julia! Where are you?'

'Beyond the wool.' Her voice came rather faintly to him. He hurried past the obstruction—there, half in and half out of the shallow water, he saw her lying on a shelf of rocks. 'Are you hurt?' he asked.

'Yes. I think I've broken my leg. Can you get a boat round? There aren't any steps this side.'

It was in fact a most awkward place in which to break a leg. The jetty was almost twenty feet high, and the water outside it so shallow as to make it difficult to bring a boat at all near to where the girl was lying.

'What happened?' Jamieson asked anxiously.

'Let's say that I slipped,' Julia replied, with her calm grin. Seeing her so smiling up at him, injured and soaking, and yet giving a careful eye to the cover-story, made the man's heart turn over; he realised that something different must have happened—Julia was not the sort of person to fall off the quay on her own account.

'Right, I'll get a boat round as fast as I can,' he said. 'Have you got any gaspers?'

'Yes, but they're soaking.'

'Well, try to catch these. Ready?' As she held up her cupped hands he took careful aim and pitched a packet of Players down—to his immense relief she caught them. 'Matches?' he asked.

'I think my lighter's still dry—wait a second.' She tried it out; it worked, and she lit a cigarette, and stuffed the packet down the front of her jersey. 'That's lovely,' Julia said, inhaling thankfully. 'Remember I *slipped*,' she added.

Jamieson hastened back to the hotel. It was not so easy to get a man and a boat on Clare Island in the late afternoon; the men were either fishing, or working on their holdings. But Mrs. O'Malley, hearing that Miss Probyn had slipped off the quay and hurt herself, routed her husband out of his regular publican's afternoon nap and made him row Jamieson down the harbour and round outside the jetty to collect the casualty.

'That's as near in as I can get—ye can walk it from here,' Mr. O'Malley said, back-watering with his oars. 'But don't be wasting any time—the tide is rising.'

Jamieson slipped expertly over the stern of the boat and waded across to where Julia was half-lying, close to a bale of wool—now a little deeper in the water than before.

'Tell me if I hurt you, but I've just got to carry you to the boat,' he said—as he spoke he stooped, picked her up, and slung her over his shoulder. Julia was tall and fully built, for all her beautiful legs; it was as much as the Colonel could do to carry her ten-and-a-half stone, or thereabouts, out to Mr. O'Malley's dinghy, wading through eighteen inches of water, over an uneven surface.

'Ouch!' said Julia, as he lowered her carefully on to the floor of the dinghy, in the bows.

'That hurt?'

'Not too much. I mean, it hurts anyhow. Mr. O'Malley, how kind of you to come and fetch me.'

'What happened ye, Miss Probyn?'

'Like a perfect fool I slipped on the quay,' Julia said, as the landlord started to row round into the harbour again.

'Are ye much hurt?'

'We'll have to ask the doctor that. Can we get hold of him?'

'He's every place!—but we'll get him all right.'

In fact when they drew in below the hotel Dr. Feinstein was there waiting for them—Mrs. O'Malley had sent out her scouts and caught him close by. Together he and Jamieson lifted the girl out of the boat, carried her up that little staircase, and laid her on her bed, where the doctor made his examination.

'Yes, you've broken your leg all right,' he said. 'Only the fibula though, and luckily down by the ankle. What on earth made you do such a damn-fool thing?'

'Oh, I slipped. I expect I am a damn fool!'

Dr. Feinstein grunted, while he prepared a splint and put it on the lower part of Julia's leg, bandaging it round the foot as well—Jamieson looked on in dismay.

'How soon can she be moved?' he asked the American, when the job was done, and they had left Julia in Mrs. O'Malley's care, having her wet clothes removed.

'Oh, any time, if we get an ambulance the far side and take her to Castlebar—or to a house where she can be cared for.'

'She's been staying with the O'Haras at Rostrunk. Would that do? They have plenty of servants.'

'By what I hear of Rostrunk it should be more than O.K.' Dr. Feinstein said. 'It seems there's a lady there that has the County in the palm of her hand.'

'Could you arrange the ambulance for tomorrow? I think Miss Probyn is rather anxious to get back.'

'Yes, I'll wire Castlebar for the ambulance. It's a perfectly clean break, with just a few lacerations where she hit the rocks; the Doctor in Martinstown will have to put it into plaster, of course—I've only done a make-shift job.' He lit an American cigarette, and held out his pack to Jamieson—the Colonel loathed Chesterfields, but took one. 'I have the impression that some way Miss Probyn got a bit of a shock,' the Doctor then said thoughtfully. 'I've given her a sedative. Did you see what happened?'

'No, I was in the hotel—I only went out when I heard her call, and found her in the water.'

'Sounds crazy to me, an active girl like that going and falling off a quay,' Feinstein said.

Jamieson didn't take up this point.

'Accidents do happen,' he said. 'Well, Doctor, if you'll draft your telegram, I'll draft mine—then we can get going. What do we owe you, by the way?'

'Forget it,' the American said. 'I'd do anything for that girl! I won't take a cent, from you or from her.'

When the two men had prepared their telegrams Mrs. O'Malley went into her little office and did some frantic pedalling; the doctor left; Jamieson went upstairs to Julia. He found her lying relaxed and sleepy.

'All right?' he asked.

'Gosh, that was some pill the little man gave me!' the girl said,

with a contented smile. 'I feel as if I could sleep for a thousand years.'

'Well sleep away. I'll come up later and see about your supper.'

'Oh I fixed that. Mrs. O'M. has got some real chicken broth brewing tonight, and I'm having it. "Just soup, Miss Probyn, after an accident," she said. Aren't they clever?'

'They're frightfully nice,' the Colonel said. He went over to the bed and kissed her on the forehead. 'Bless you, my darling,' he murmured, and went out. Julia began to cry after the kiss, but almost at once she fell asleep.

The Colonel tried to settle down again to his report on the Clare Island installations, but found it hard to concentrate; Julia's accident had stirred up his emotions towards her more violently than ever, and he longed, in particular, to know what had really happened down on the quay. He was actually relieved when his efforts were interrupted by Dr. Feinstein's voice calling out below his window—'Colonel, could you come down a moment?'

'Yes,' he called back, again locking his notes in his despatch-case before he left the room.

In the garden he found the doctor, holding a very small boy tightly by the hand.

'This is Patrick Joseph O'Malley,' the doctor said. 'He has something to tell you. Come on down the quay.'

'Tis P. J. I'm called always,' the small boy protested as he was led, wriggling and reluctant, along the jetty. When they were well out of earshot of the hotel Feinstein stopped and said—'Now tell the Colonel what you told me.'

'Is it a Colonel he is?' the small boy asked, staring up at Jamieson's tall figure with sudden interest.

'Yes,' Jamieson said.

'Were ye in battles—real battles?'

'Yes, in lots—in Greece, and Africa, and Italy.'

'Ah, ye were out foreign! Would ye tell me about your battles? I never met a man was in a real foreign war,' the child said eagerly.

'Yes, I will,' Jamieson said, smiling. 'But first you must tell me what you saw.' He guessed that the clever little Jewish doctor had found a witness of Julia's accident.

'Twas the little small ugly foreign woman that done it,' the

child said. 'The young lady was sitting on the side of the quay, and that one was up above among the wool; someway she tipped a bale, and it hit the young lady, and she went into the water.'

'Where were you when you saw this?' Jamieson asked. He wanted to be quite clear on his facts.

'Up in the wool.'

'What were you doing there?' the Colonel enquired.

'Me and me small sister was playing houses in it,' P. J. replied.

Jamieson almost laughed. This was a perfectly satisfactory explanation—children, the world over, will 'play houses' in anything which enables them to re-create the caverns in which the human race spent its first thousands of years. But he had one or two further questions.

'What was the young lady doing when the bale fell and knocked her into the water?'

'Scribblin' or drawin' something on a little small pad,' P. J. replied unhesitatingly.

'What happened to the pad?' the Colonel wanted to know—Julia might have been writing something better not in alien hands.

'It fell on the quay, and that one picked it up and took it.'

'And what did the foreign woman do then?'

'The small man that's with her had a boat waiting at the steps, and she ran back to him and got into it, and they rowed away to the Castle.'

Jamieson had seen them doing this himself. 'And what did you do?' he asked the child.

'We went on playing houses till 'twas tea-time, and the Doctor found us as we were going home. Me mother will be mad at me if I don't go back now,' P. J. said, wriggling more violently than ever in Dr. Feinstein's grasp.

'Run home and get your tea,' Feinstein said, releasing him. But the child didn't go.

'When will ye be telling me about your battles?' he demanded of Jamieson.

'Come down to the hotel when you've had your tea, and I'll tell you all about them, if you'll give me one promise.'

'What's that?'

'That you don't tell your mother, or anyone else, what you saw. Will you promise?'

'I will that.'

'What about your little sister? Did she see it too?'

'Ah no—she was within in the wee houseen we was making.'

'All right—well come down presently.' P. J. shot away to the village.

'Now why did you make him give you that promise?' Feinstein asked. 'He's a witness. Aren't you going to put the police onto this?'

'No,' Jamieson said. 'Mrs. Czech may have dislodged the bale by accident. For one thing, there are no police on the Island.'

'They come over from Louisburg if they're wanted.'

'Well they aren't wanted now,' Jamieson said firmly. He paused. 'Miss Probyn told me that you told her about the installations you saw being put in,' he said carefully. 'Not very nice. But these things are much better handled with the minimum of publicity, if they're to be handled at all.'

Dr. Feinstein laughed out at Jamieson's phrase 'Not very nice'—it was so ultra-British. But he listened carefully to the Englishman's last words.

'Are you in a position to handle it? Miss Probyn didn't seem at all sure that she was,' he said.

'I'm not sure that I can,' Jamieson said, more carefully than ever. 'I shall certainly try. It sounds as if it might be quite important.'

'It's important all right. I'm fairly certain that these checkpoints are to enable the Russians to make dead sure that they blow Dublin and Cork to glory—I guess they must have others to fix places like Glasgow and Liverpool. Of course they can only put them on out-of-the-way places, like this.'

Jamieson looked at Feinstein with deep interest.

'How did you come to decide that that is the purpose of these bits of machinery?' he asked.

'I'm interested in electronics,' the doctor replied—'and I have a friend in the States who's pretty high up in that field. They have satellite-trackers over there, too.'

'I see,' was all Jamieson said.

'Well, I suppose you know your own business best, but I don't like to see that little woman get away with smashing Miss Probyn up,' Feinstein said in a dissatisfied tone.

'She may not, of course—let's hope she doesn't. But I don't

think the local police would be much help.'

The two men strolled back to the hotel, and presently collected the replies to their telegrams. An ambulance from Castlebar would be at Roonagh at eleven the following morning; a long, agitated wire from Lady Helen said that of course darling Julia must come back to Rostrunk to be nursed, and how terrible!

'Well all that seems Okay,' the little doctor said—they had fetched their drinks from the bar, and were sitting on a bench in the garden. 'I guess I'll just go up and have a look at my patient.'

At this point young P. J. O'Malley appeared, demanding to be given the promised account of the Colonel's battles 'out foreign'. Jamieson applied himself very nicely to this task. He stopped short when Feinstein reappeared. 'How is she?' he asked.

'Fine, She has a superb constitution—she'll be all right.'

'Can I go and see her?'

'Yes, if you don't stay too long.'

Jamieson rose.

'Thank you more than I can say,' he said. 'You won't have another drink?'

'Thanks, no. I have some patients to see.'

'Will you promise me to keep this quiet, unless—and until—I give you the say-so?' Jamieson asked.

'Sure. Do it your own way.' He shook the Colonel's hand, and went off.

'But what happened then?' P. J. demanded. 'Ye were in the middle of that battle, and the tanks crossing the wadi.'

'Ah, yes—well we got the tanks across, and beat the Italians; they just ran away! That'll have to be all for now, P. J.—I must get my tea.'

Julia was drinking chicken broth when Jamieson went up to her room.

'Heaven soup!' she said.

'So glad. How do you feel?'

'Still sleepy. It's stopped hurting for the moment.'

'Did Mrs. O'M. tell you that we're off tomorrow?'

'Oh yes, ambulance and all. That will make a sensation in the Bay, an ambulance at Rostrunk!' the girl said, with her burbling laugh. 'And poor Helen in a frightful fuss, I gather.'

So much for the secrecy and silence of the postal service, the

Colonel thought, as he handed Julia Mrs. O'Malley's neatly-written telegram from Lady Helen. The girl read it.

'Oh well, that's all right. But I do wish you could have seen the Abbey and the Castle properly.'

'Your so-called accident gives us an admirable excuse for hurrying back, anyhow,' Jamieson said—'though I'm wretchedly sorry about your leg.'

'Why do you say "so-called" accident?' she asked, staring at him.

'Because I've just been told, by an eye-witness, how you came to be toppled into the water.'

'Who by, for pity's sake? There wasn't a soul about.'

'Yes there was—a little boy who was playing up in the wool-bales.'

'How on earth did you get hold of him?'

'I didn't—Feinstein did. And this infant gave the completely clear and factual account that children do give. What had you written on the pad that Mrs. Czech picked up?'

'Only a letter to Edina about the birds, and this sweet place. Nothing to do that revolting little woman any good, or you any harm,' Julia replied.

'You hadn't signed it?'

'No.'

Jamieson decided to leave her. Julia's colour had risen; he wanted her to sleep. He got up from the single chair, and went over to the bed.

'My darling one, take it easy! We've got everything we came for, thanks to you. I only wish you hadn't paid for it with a broken leg.'

'What shall you do about the Czechs?' Julia asked.

'Tell London. They're in touch with Dublin.'

'Will the Yank keep quiet? He seems rather upset.'

'I've sworn him to silence. Of course he wanted to lay on the police—Americans always do! I've sworn Master Patrick Joseph O'Malley to silence too.'

'Oh, was your eye-witness little P. J.? His Mother is such a nice woman.' She lay back on the pillows smiling, looking more relaxed. 'But I can't think how you bribed P. J. to keep his mouth shut,' she added.

'By telling him about my battles "out foreign", darling,' the

Colonel said—the charming Mayo phrase for abroad had stuck in his mind. He stooped down and kissed her. ‘Now sleep,’ he said. ‘I’ll tell you how much I love you some other time. Good night.’

But those last words of Philip Jamieson’s made Julia cry again—what could it all mean? She dabbed at her eyes when she heard Mrs. O’Malley’s step on the stairs, coming to fetch her supper-tray. After the kind woman had gone it was some time before she fell asleep once more.

Chapter II

CLARE ISLAND didn't boast such a thing as a stretcher, but a door lifted off its hinges and lashed to two oars served to carry Julia along the quay and down to the mail-boat next morning. Dr. Feinstein insisted on coming across to Roonagh with them, and seeing the girl safely installed in the ambulance from Castlebar, which was provided with a proper stretcher, orderlies, and a nurse. The little American had sent another telegram overnight to Dr. O'Brien in Martinstown, telling him to expect a casualty with a broken leg about noon; and when the ambulance, followed by Jamieson, drew up at the surgery the doctor was expecting them. Julia was carried in; the ambulance-driver and the orderlies went off to the nearest pub, and Dr. O'Brien skilfully set Julia's leg with the handy modern plaster, already attached to strips of canvas.

'Ah, 'tis a clean break low down in the fibula—nothing at all! She'll be walking again in seven weeks, or eight at the worst,' he told the Colonel. 'Those lacerations are nothing—I've given her a shot of penicillin. I'll be out to Rostrunk to see her in a day or two.'

The doctor's 'housekeep' collected the ambulance personnel from the inn, and they drove on to Rostrunk in time for a late lunch. The ambulance men carried Julia up that curved staircase and into her pretty corner bedroom with its two windows, one looking out on the tall grey shape of the old castle, the other down the long inlet to the open Atlantic. Julia was apologetic for 'being such a nuisance'; Lady Helen, while she and Annie were undressing the girl and putting her to bed, was all concern.

'Dearest, what may you eat?'

'Everything—and drink too!'

'Annie, tell Attracta to bring up a tray with gin and sherry and vermouth—and everything—now at once; and let Nonie know that Miss Probyn will have the same lunch as the rest of us—the trout, and the veal, and the raspberry mousse.'

'Right you be, Lady.'

'Veal?' Julia asked, surprised. Veal is normally unobtainable in rural Ireland; the farmers will not sacrifice calves, which can make a good price later for 'finishing' in England, merely to furnish a delicious form of food.

'Julia, so lucky! Daphne's last calf was born with crumpled feet; I made Tom Grady feed her on the bottle for a month, and then got Arthur to kill her and keep the joints in his frig—so we're going to have lovely veal for *weeks*.'

Julia laughed. This was all so completely the Mayo she loved. Attracta appeared with a varied tray of drinks, which she set on one of the deep window-sills; she then enquired earnestly about Miss Probyn's accident?

'I'm not too bad, thank you Attracta. The Doctor says I'll be all right in no time.'

'Well thanks be to God.'

While Julia and Lady Helen took their aperitifs upstairs, Jamieson was having drinks with the General in the library; he had agreed to remain for luncheon. 'I've seen those birds. Fascinating, they are.'

Michael O'Hara made a polite comment about the fulmars. But like so many soldiers his mind only ran on three, or at most four tracks; at the moment his newest track was his neighbour's Communist sympathies, and he was soon running along it.

'You were quite right about that fella MacMahon—he is a Communist, or as good as. I drove up to Dublin and asked about him. He's rather odd—dances, or something like that. They have their eye on him—anyhow, he's not trustworthy.'

Lady Helen, coming in at that moment, heard the last words.

'Who's not trustworthy?' she asked.

'That man MacMahon. I don't know why we see so much of them.'

'I like her,' Lady Helen said.

When Jamieson had left she questioned her husband further about Tony MacMahon's untrustworthiness, and he told her.

'Oh, that's what you dashed up to Dublin about. Darling, why are you so furtive?'

But the report was a relief to her mind; and so it was to Julia's when, later, it was passed on to her.

'Anyhow, we shall soon hear from Mrs. H.,' that young woman said cheerfully.

Back at the hotel Jamieson telephoned to Dublin for a flight to London the following evening; then he sought out his friendly landlord, and apologised for his abrupt departure.

'It's too bad you never got a day on the river,' Mr. Bowden-Brown said regretfully. 'Tell me, how is Miss Probyn? I heard she had an accident on the Island and broke her leg.'

'Yes, she did; but Dr. O'Brien thinks she'll be about again quite soon.'

'That's good.' The landlord looked at Jamieson, wondering why he was hurrying off when his 'young lady' was laid up—but the Colonel's manner always constituted a warning to the curious, and he said no more.

'Shall I find Shamus Moran at home?' Jamieson asked. 'I shall want him to drive me in to the train.'

Mr. Bowden-Brown telephoned; Mr. Moran was in, and the Colonel walked along the beautiful river and up the grey street, made his arrangements, and settled his bill. Shamus insisted on his customer coming to have a drink, and they went into Josie's little bar.

'Well now Colonel, isn't this a terrible thing altogether, Miss Probyn going and breaking her leg?' Josie said, as he poured out their drinks. 'What happened her?'

'She had a fall. It was most unfortunate,' Jamieson said. The careful English expressions fell like a douche of cold water on the warm Irish exuberance; but Josie Walsh was not easily quelled.

'Is she bad? Will it mend?'

'Yes, thank you so much. She should be all right quite soon.'

'And you're staying in it?'

'No—unfortunately I have to get back.' He paused. 'Apart from this accident it was a wonderful trip,' he said—the bar was full, and every one was listening. 'Those fulmars are quite extraordinary.'

'Tis wonderful what people will do to see nachur!' Josie observed to the bar at large.

Jamieson decided to ask a question himself, and did so, quietly, to Shamus Moran—it was his method of putting the ball into the other court.

'Did your boys get General O'Hara's boat put right?' he asked—and was at once aware of a fresh stir of interest in the bar.

'Not yet, Colonel.' Shamus looked slightly embarrassed; the audience looked amused. 'It seems there's some replacements wanted; we'll have to send away for them,' poor Mr. Moran said, rather unhappily.

'Ye'd do well to send away for an enginair!' a voice among the crowd observed, causing subdued mirth. Josie Walsh intervened.

'Another drink, Colonel?'

But Jamieson refused a second drink. The ball was now quite definitely in the other court.

Next morning he dashed over to see Julia and say goodbye. She was sitting up in bed, a fleecy white bed-jacket round her shoulders.

'Sleep well?' he asked.

'Yes, perfectly. O'Brien gave me some pills for the pain, but so did the Yank—and his work much better.'

'*Pain?*' he asked, distressed.

'Well bones don't really like being broken, so they protest.'

'Does it hurt *now*?' Jamieson enquired anxiously.

'No, not a bit. And with Feinstein's pills I shan't *let* it hurt,' the girl said blithely.

'Darling, you do realise that I really must get back at once?' Jamieson said. 'I hate leaving you, but I know you're in the best of hands.'

'Sure I am. Look at this room, and this view! I made Annie swing the bed round this morning, to let me look down the Bay; she'll swing it back into the corner tonight. Michael has all his beds mounted on hospital castors, so that they can be wheeled about like trolleys.'

'He would,' the Colonel said. 'Where practical things are concerned, I think he's one of the most intelligent men in the world.'

They chatted on, happily, till it was time for him to go.

'Promise to let me know how you get on, and when you are coming back,' he said. But this time his farewell kiss didn't make Julia cry—it rather overwhelmed her. Anyhow quite soon she would be hearing from the omniscient Mrs. H.

But Mrs. Hathaway's reply was delayed long enough to cause Julia to fret. She had failed to register that Mrs. Hathaway was off on a round of visits in Scotland; Julia's letter chased her from

house to house, missing her everywhere, till she fetched up at Glentoran. Morning after morning when Attracta brought up the post about eleven, Julia scanned the envelopes eagerly, looking for one in the firm, elegant, rather old-fashioned handwriting—and every day in vain. When the parlour-maid had gone she would stare out from her bed at the long narrow vista of the Bay between its low green shores, with the blue line of the Atlantic beyond; on the right she could just see the chimneys of the MacMahon's small white house, and often the sight increased her distress.

One morning Attracta, having handed her the letters, said—

'Miss Probyn, old Katie Hennelly is below, wanting to see you. Can she come up?'

'Yes, of course.' Julia glanced at the window-sill, where a tray of drinks now stood permanently. 'Bring up another glass and some more gin—there's hardly a drop in that bottle.'

'I'll do that, Miss Probyn.' The maid shortly returned to usher in old Katie, putting a fresh bottle of gin on the tray.

'Katie, how good to see you! Wait, Attracta—did you draw that cork? Then give Mrs. Hennelly some gin. Is it vermouth you like with it, Katie?'

'Well bless ye, Miss Probyn dear, 'tis by itself I like it. . . . May the Lord love you!' the old woman said, as Attracta put a glass of neat gin on a small table by her chair.

'I heard ye broke your leg out on the Island,' Katie said, sitting down and taking a sip of her gin. 'How did ye come to fall off the quay?'

So Katie knew that much!

'I overbalanced,' Julia said.

'Is that the way it was? I was hearing that someone threw a sack of wool at ye.'

'Oh no,' Julia said, in her slowest tones, though she was aghast that this story should already have reached the mainland. 'There were some children playing up among the wool-bales,' she said deliberately, 'and they did topple one down, but it didn't throw me in.'

'And is your leg mending?' Katie asked, her eyes sparkling like bits of blue glass in her red weather-beaten old face.

'Yes, splendidly, thank you.'

'That's good. Is the gentleman in it yet?'

'Do you mean Colonel Jamieson? No, he had to go back to London.'

'Well I wonder he'd leave ye. There's a lovely man!'

The days slid by. Julia hobbled downstairs, clutching the slender banisters, and moved from room to room with the help of a rubber-shod stick. At last Mrs. Hathaway's letter arrived; when it did, it was unhelpfully indefinite.

'I only got your letter here, where of course I am out of touch. I do seem to remember that he married someone very unsatisfactory, long ago, but I thought it had all come to an end. I will try to find out more when I get back to London—one can't *write* about these things.' (Was this a subtle rebuke, Julia wondered?—she herself had written about them.) The letter ended—'When do you come back?'

In fact Julia got back to London the day after Mrs. Hathaway returned there from Glentoran; in the meantime she had received several letters from Jamieson, each enquiring urgently about the progress of her recovery. One however read cheerfully: 'I think I've cooked the little Maritime Bohemians' goose. The Irish Fishery Patrol will have an eye open for that allegedly Scand boat, and keep her outside the three-mile limit; so your female friend will have to take one of the normal routes to get home. If they *have* entry visas they are bound to be forged—and I fancy that little couple will be rather thoroughly interrogated. Ireland doesn't like Communists at all! Meanwhile everyone here is delighted at our—your—success.' And he too asked when Julia was coming back?

In her reply Julia was vague—'Probably the week after next,' but she gave no date. When her plane touched down at London Airport and she started to get out, she was amazed to see Jamieson's tall figure waiting on the apron at the foot of the steps.

'So you can walk again, bless you,' he said, as she came down.

'Yes. But how on earth did you know when I was coming?'

'Aer-Lingus, of course. They have such things as passenger-lists. I've got a car outside,' he added, 'and one of our people will take your luggage down to Chelsea for your Mrs. Titmuss to unpack. I thought we might have lunch at my place.'

'But Mrs. Titmuss is expecting me to lunch,' Julia protested.

'Oh no she isn't! I've fixed that. She was delighted—said it would give her more time to "get Miss Probyn's things straight,"'

Jamieson replied. 'Yes?' he said to one of the airport officials.

'We have all the lady's things ready, Sir, and here is the car.'

'Right—thank you. Have the luggage taken to that other car, will you? Here's the chit from the Customs.' He returned to Julia. 'Where are your keys? Mrs. Tom-tit will want them.'

Julia obediently handed over her keys. She was rather overcome by all these masterly arrangements, and also very thankful not to have to hang about in the usual confusion at London Airport: passing the immigration control, trying to spot her luggage on the conveyor-belts, trying to get someone to carry it, waiting to get it through the Customs; queueing to board the coach to the Air-Terminal, queueing again there for a taxi. This V.I.P. treatment was far more agreeable—she and Jamieson were driven across the apron in one of the airport cars to the barrier, where an Immigration officer was ready to check her passport; then on to where Jamieson's car was parked. They got into it and drove off.

'Lucky you,' Julia said to her companion as they sped up the Great West Road. 'Normally London Airport is my idea of Hell.'

Julia entered Jamieson's 'place' with the deepest interest. It was in Gray's Inn; shapely rooms looked out onto a space of shaven lawn shaded by great plane-trees—it was strangely quiet, in spite of the city all round.

'How beautiful,' she said, going to the window. 'But how on earth did you get in here? I thought only people like Judges could live in Inns.'

'My Father was a Judge, and when he died I got the reversion of his Chambers. I was extraordinarily lucky—there's always a huge queue now.'

A manservant in a white jacket and a chef's high hat, who spoke with a strong Peebles accent, served first cocktails, and later on an exceedingly good lunch. The rooms were full of beautiful furniture, period English, interspersed here and there with some lovely pieces of marquetricie, whose pale inlay lit up and set off the severe mahogany and walnut. The pictures were French, and very good; there was a lovely Boudin over the mantelpiece in the sitting-room, and two Seurats in the dining-room.

'Did you collect all these pictures?' Julia asked.

'Not all—several belonged to my Mother. I bought the

Boudin and the Harpignies myself, though. I like Harpignies—he's such a sunny painter.'

This apt piece of understatement pleased Julia as much as it surprised her—indeed Philip Jamieson's whole background as expressed in his rooms was both unexpected, and delightful. Only did any of it really matter to her? The horrid question crept in, tarnishing the pleasure of the moment. To cover her discomfort she asked about the furniture.

'A lot of it is family stuff. This dining-table has never been out of our possession since good Mr. Hepplewhite made it for my great-great-grandmother, and the chairs too. But my old Dad was fond of furniture, and picked up most of the William and Mary things—he liked walnut.'

'Quite right. But the marquetric? So few English people have the courage to buy it.'

He was pleased.

'I'm glad you approve of that. In fact I broke away from tradition, and bought it myself. Dutch, of course; English marquetric has always been beyond the reach of anyone but millionaires.'

Presently he went on to tell her what had happened to the two Czechs.

'The Irish Fishery Patrol picked up that Russian motor-cruiser, and chased her out of the three-mile limit in double-quick time. So our friends had to go down to Shannon to get a plane home to Prague. Of course they'd got forged entry visas, but Shannon had been tipped off, and I gather your little assailant had quite a thin time before they were allowed to leave.'

'Well I'm not sorry,' Julia said uncharitably. 'When are your people going to clear that up? And the Highland places, too?'

'All in good time. We have rumours of another set of installations further South, and it might be as well to deal with the whole lot at once.'

'Others? Oh, where?'

'Don't be so inquisitive! If I need you, I'll tell you when the time comes.'

'Oh very well.' Julia spoke rather coldly.

'Darling, I'm only being official, as I have to be,' he said, reaching out to take her hand.

'I think officiality, if there is such a word, is rather misplaced

on the part of your wretched Service where I am concerned,' Julia said.

'I entirely agree. I'm just "working to rule", my precious' the man said. 'Come and have some coffee.'

When the chef-clad manservant had brought in coffee and liqueurs to the sitting-room Jamieson said—'That will be all, thank you, Buchan. A good lunch.'

'Thank you, Sir.' He withdrew. Jamieson poured out coffee for Julia and for himself; he lit cigarettes for both of them. The girl had a sense of something impending from the moment Jamieson said 'That will be all'—and she was not mistaken. Her host came and sat on the sofa beside her, and spoke rather slowly.

'I said on Clare Island that I would tell you later on how much I love you—I'm going to now.' Again he made to take her hand, but stopped, checked by the expression on her face. 'Darling, what is the matter? What on earth is wrong?' he asked.

'Susan,' Julia gulped out.

He got up, and strode about the room; then he came and sat down beside her again.

'Susan, God help her, died over eighteen months ago,' he said. 'I say God help her, because she couldn't help herself—her father died of D.T.s, though I didn't know that when I married her.' He paused. 'It was rather hell for both of us, but really worse for her; all those years when it was coming on, and she knew it, and tried to stop and couldn't—eating pounds and pounds of sweets.' He put a hand over his eyes for a moment. 'In the end there was nothing for it but a Home; but she hated the idea of that so much that we left it too long, I imagine—anyhow they couldn't make this modern cure work with her. She came out once, supposed to be all right; but in a few weeks she was as bad as ever again.'

'Oh,' the girl said. 'Oh, Philip!'

'Yes. She quite realised that she had got to go back, but she couldn't take it any more, and killed herself.'

'How?' Julia asked.

'Sleeping-pills. How she got enough to do it Heaven knows, but dr . . . ' he bit the word off—'but people with that craving get as crafty as the devil! She always managed to get hold of drink, even when there wasn't a drop in the house, and I was

keeping her short of money on purpose—I did all the house-keeping myself.’

‘Oh, don’t!’ Julia shivered; she could imagine what all this had been like.

‘I told you it had been hell,’ Jamieson said. ‘But now I should like to know who brought all this up, and why you didn’t know that she was dead?’ His face and voice were very severe. ‘It can’t have been Mrs. Hathaway,’ he said. ‘She would never make mischief.’

‘No, it wasn’t,’ Julia hesitated; but she realised that Jamieson meant to have the truth, and she had no particular wish to shield Tony, who had caused her so much needless distress. ‘Tony MacMahon told Helen that Susan was still in a home,’ she said.

‘Oh he did, did he? Well one day someone will have a few plain words with Master MacMahon,’ the man said coldly. ‘They already think in Dublin that he’d be as well to drop his Commie connections—and he might be told to stop lying at the same time.’

‘Think of Blanaid,’ said Julia.

‘No, I won’t think of Blarney, nice little thing as she is. At this moment I’m only going to think about you and me, Julia and Philip!’ He put his arm round her. ‘My darling, you must know already that I love you very much; and now that all these miserable lies are out of the way, will you marry me?’

‘Yes, I will.’

He took her in his arms, but first he held her away, gazing into her face.

‘Do you love me? I don’t want you to marry me out of pity—I’m afraid I rather let myself go about Susan, but you brought that up.’

‘I know I did—and I brought it up because I love you, and wanted to marry you, and thought I couldn’t,’ Julia said frankly. The complete simplicity of this statement pleased him immensely; then he also remembered her face of absolute misery when he had said, not so long before, that he proposed to tell her how much he loved her, while she still thought that Susan was alive. The recollection perfected his recognition of her sincerity and her integrity. Now he drew her close, kissed her face instead of studying it, and did, at last, tell her in great detail how much he loved her, and why.

'It isn't only that you're so ridiculously beautiful,' he explained at one point. 'Of course it's absurd for one woman to have so much—your eyes and your hair and your colouring; monstrously unfair, really—any one asset would make most women's fortune! But you see you're *nice*, too. Beautiful women are so apt to put all their eggs in the beauty basket, and bank on that; and sooner or later they become bitchy.'

'Oh, do they?' Julia asked contentedly, leaning back on the sofa, her head on his shoulder. 'How funny. But how am I nice?—I mean, what makes you think I am?'

'The way you treat people—being so patient with that old bore Michael O'Hara, and loving to Mrs. Katie What's-her-Name, and so tolerant that first evening with little Feinstein, when he was impertinent to you in the bar.'

'That paid off in the end, Philip.'

'Indeed it did. But that wasn't why you were forbearing at the time—that was just your natural charity, and it's one of the things I love you for.' He covered her face with kisses.

'Ooh, stop! I want to ask you something.'

Reluctantly, Philip Jamieson removed his lips from her face.

'What?'

'Did you check on Feinstein at all? Does he know what he's talking about?'

'Yes of course we did, and he does. His chum is very high-powered indeed.' But sweetheart, need we think about that *now*?'

'Oh, it just came into my mind, when you mentioned him.'

'Well put it out again! I want you to concentrate on *us*, as I am doing.'

She pushed his face away, very gently, with one hand.

'Give me a cigarette, darling.'

'Too many kisses?' he asked, lighting one for her.

'No, never too many—just pauses in between! I think you ought to be glad to get a wife who's keen on the job,' she said.

'Oh am I not? Only today, my sweet . . .'

'I can't help it, Philip—when a question comes into my mind, it pops out. You'll have to get used to it. Anyhow there'll never be another today.'

'There'll be thousands of todays!' he said, and again stifled her with kisses.

Their meeting ended very sweetly and gently. Both were deeply happy, felt perfectly secure.

'When do we announce it?' Philip asked, as he was driving her back to Chelsea.

'When I've told Edina and Mrs. H. They're the ones who matter.'

'When it's been announced, how soon can we get married? Shall you want aeons to get a trousseau?'

'No—just time for a wedding-dress. I've got heaps of clothes. But where shall we live?' she asked. 'How much room is there in your lovely Inn? I shall want a female domestic of some sort, to do my washing and mending and so on—I don't suppose Buchan would care to be saddled with that,' she said with her slow laugh.

'I rather think the set immediately below mine will fall free pretty soon; if so, it would give us plenty of space: staff and spare-rooms below, us up above.'

'Like the jolly sailor-boys,' said Julia, laughing again—she was so happy that delight and laughter fairly bubbled out of her. 'But what about the queue?'

'That set belongs to an old uncle of mine, a barrister, who's a Member of the Inn, and he's retiring; he *might* wangle it for us.'

'How legal your family seems to be! Do make him wangle like mad—I'd love to live there.'

He dropped her at the door of her flat. 'I must race back to the office—I'm pretty late.'

Mrs. Titmuss had unpacked everything, and the good woman was now pressing clothes in the kitchen.

'Well Miss, at least it doesn't show,' she observed, studying Julia's nylon-clad legs. 'That's one mercy. But what a performance! Mrs. Hathaway's been on the telephone,' Mrs. Titmuss pursued.

'Oh, is she back? Good.'

'Yes. She said you was to ring her up the moment you come in, but I told her you weren't back yet, and that you'd want to rest, after travelling all the way from Ireland.'

'Oh thank you.' But Julia moved towards the telephone.

'Now you go and lie down, Miss,' Mrs. Titmuss said firmly. 'The old lady can wait till you've had a nap. You ring when you want a cup of tea, and telephone then.'

Julia really felt like lying down, and did so. 'The Colonel's a

splendid gentleman,' Mrs. Titmuss said meaningfully as she went out.

What with her early start from Dublin, and so much emotion, Julia did fall asleep; she awoke full of a vague sense of happiness, and it was a few seconds before she remembered why—all the misery about Susan, which had tormented her for the past eight weeks, was over, and she was going to marry Philip. She pressed the bell beside her bed, and lay in great contentment, with no doubts or back-thoughts. In a couple of minutes Mrs. Titmuss wheeled in a trolley-table with her tea.

'What about supper, Miss?'

'I shan't know till I've rung up Mrs. Hathaway. I had a lovely sleep.

'That's good.' Mrs. Titmuss lingered. 'Excuse me, Miss'—a pause.

'Yes, Mrs. Titmuss?'

'If you ask *me*, I think you should marry him,' the good woman said.

'I'm going to.'

'You *are*? Well you're not making any mistake!' To Julia's surprise and pleasure her servant stooped down and gave her a hearty kiss. 'I'm ever so glad. It's time you got married, and he's perfect.'

After eating several sandwiches Julia rang up Mrs. Hathaway.

'Oh my dear thild, you *are* back! Is it true you broke your leg?' (Julia, dissatisfied with Mrs. Hathaway's unhelpful letter about Susan, hadn't bothered to mention this fact.) 'But it's better? You're mobile? I'm so thankful. Well won't you come round as soon as you can?—for drinks.'

Julia rang for her car to be sent round; then she pushed the bell for Mrs. Titmuss again.

'In to supper—whatever you'd got for lunch.'

'Is she pleased?' Mrs. Titmuss asked.

'Who, Mrs. Hathaway? I haven't told her yet. You're the only person who knows so far, Mrs. Titmuss.'

'Well think of that! When will it be in the papers?'

'When I've told Mrs. Hathaway and Mrs. Reeder. Now don't you go making a bit on the side by selling it to the *Daily Express* tonight, Mrs. Titmuss, or I'll fire you,' Julia said.

'Oh Miss, the very idea!' The daily laughed heartily.

'It's often done,' Julia said. 'Three-quarters of the stuff in the gossip-columns in the papers is sold by peoples' maids and butlers.'

'Now you're putting ideas into my head, Miss,' said Mrs. Titmuss, still laughing. 'I see a gold-mine ahead of me! Wait till I tell Titmuss.'

'Wait till I've told Mrs. Hathaway,' Julia said. 'Is that green dress pressed?'

Julia drove rather gingerly through the crowding west-bound traffic between Chelsea and Mayfair, wondering at first if her newly-healed leg would manage the brake and accelerator pedals—however it did, with only an odd twinge of pain; by the time she swung into the mews to park her car she felt quite confident. Up in the flat Mrs. Hathaway showed slight signs of fuss.

'Dear child, I *am* so glad that you have come. I wanted to get hold of you at once, because I did manage to find out about Colonel's Jamieson's marriage on my way home; I stayed with the Stewarts, and they knew everything. I felt my letter had been so unhelpful. His wife is dead.'

'I know,' Julia said.

'How did you find out?'

'He told me, at lunch today. We're engaged,' Julia said. 'I do hope you approve, darling Mrs. H.'

The radiance in the girl's face as she announced this news caused the old lady to hoist herself up out of her chair to embrace her god-daughter.

'Approve? Dearest child, I'm *delighted*. Of course I worried about poor Susan when I saw the way the wind was blowing; I ought to have found out sooner. But one gets so tired—and then so unenterprising,' Mrs. Hathaway said sadly. 'Even to telephone sometimes seems more than one can summon the energy for.'

Julia gave her a hug, and sat her down in her chair again.

'Let me get you a drink,' she said. 'Gin, or brandy, or a little whisk?'

'Some of your rich fiancé's wonderful brandy, please.'

'Is he rich?' Julia asked casually, pouring out. 'Not that it matters, as I am,' she added.

'Well yes, fairly. But I want you to know what the Stewarts told me.'

'Carry on,' Julia said, taking her own glass to a chair, and sitting down.

'It seems he was an angel to her,' Mrs. Hathaway said. 'Of course her mother knew what was wrong, and did all she could to push him into the marriage, to get Susan off her hands. Poor Mrs. Broughton had had enough of D.T.s, with her husband.'

'Poor souls,' Julia said. 'But Mrs. H., why do you say you saw which way the wind was blowing? I thought I'd kept pretty calm.'

'Oh yes, dear child—but Philip was blowing an absolute gale!' She paused. 'Oh, I am so glad. After all those boss-shots—poor Major Torrens, and then that wretched Antrobus, this is so perfect.'

Julia laughed a little wryly at Mrs. Hathaway's use of the expression 'boss-shots'. Presently Mrs. Hathaway suggested that they should ring up Edina and tell her.

'Yes, let's. Philip is hotching to put it in *The Times*, but I said I must tell you and her first.'

Edina Reeder was in, and was told.

'Oh well, I thought it might come to that. I'm *very* pleased, Julia; I like him a lot. And not before it was time, I may say! Hold on—here's Philip.' Her voice was indistinctly audible, speaking to her husband—then his firm tones came down the line.

'Julia? My dear, all congratulations! I think he's a splendid fellow. And really you might just as well marry into the Service, and be on the strength, as do all this free-lancing for them, and not get a penny.'

'How money-minded you are, Philip! But I'm glad you're pleased.'

'I am—tremendously.'

'Oh, there it goes pipping again,' Julia said. 'Good night, Philip.'

'Are they pleased?' Mrs. Hathaway asked.

'Yes, very—both of them.'

'What was the "money-minded" part about?' the old lady asked.

'Oh, Philip—I mean Philip-Edina—why must they both be called Philip?—has always been so cross about my doing things for Colin and never being paid,' Julia replied airily. 'He said

that when I marry the other Philip, I should be "on the strength".'

Presently Julia asked how the Professor was getting on?—by now it was late September, and after the equinox the days begin to shorten rapidly in high latitudes. Mrs. Hathaway said that she expected him back any day. 'And for the winter he plans some excavations in the Scillies.'

'The Scillies? I thought there was nothing there but daffodils and early potatoes,' Julia said.

'Oh no, my dear child—the Islands are full of pre-history. And it's a lovely winter climate to work in—so mild; his bronchitis ought to leave him alone there.'

'Good,' said Julia. 'Well, I've never seen the Scillies, and I don't suppose I ever shall.'

But there she was wrong.

Chapter 12

JULIA'S marriage to Philip Jamieson was announced for early in January. The date was imposed by when they could get possession of the Uncle's chambers below Philip's; this would only be at the beginning of November, and there was a certain amount to be done to them—Philip's Uncle had not had very modern ideas. Julia was firm, not to say tough, about these arrangements. 'For pity's sake don't let's economise on power-points,' she said. 'And all the electric fires in the bedrooms must switch on by the bed, like mine does here.'

'Let me see.' This conversation took place in Julia's flat, and he went and examined her bedroom.

'Yes—very handy; I never saw it before. What's this other switch and plug by your bed?'

'For my kettle; to make tea if I happen to wake early. I like to be independent.'

'Well about that, I will let you be,' he said, smiling. 'A good idea. Anything else?'

'Yes. All the plugs must be at table-level—none of that ghastly grovelling on the floor to light a fire or boil a kettle! Goodness, what *torturers* electricians are, if you leave them to their own devices.'

They were both very happy during those weeks of early autumn, planning their home; each finding more all the time to approve of and value in the other. Jamieson was impressed by Julia's practical skills about household matters; she was touched by his sensitiveness.

'Who will give you away?' he asked one day.

'I never thought. There's no one except Colin or Mrs. H., or perhaps Philip. He's older, of course.'

'I should say Reeder every time—he's a substantial person.'

Julia laughed. 'Is poor Colin so insubstantial?'

'Oh darling, you know what I mean. Colin is essentially an adolescent, and probably always will be.'

'Well, we must see how they all feel about it.'

'Do you want a lot of bridesmaids?' Jamieson enquired.

'Oh no—I'm too old for that.' She paused. 'I would like to have one, though, and I think she'd like to do it.'

'Who is that?'

'The Duke of Ericeira's daughter, Luzia. I was her governess at one point, and I'm very fond of her.'

'Oh, you mean all that Portuguese mix-up, and getting out the Hungarian priest—I remember. But why should you have bothered to be any child's governess?'

'Well really to get inside Portugal,' Julia responded. 'I think my method is as good as Mr. Gunther's, if not better.'

'By what I remember, distinctly better, as far as we were concerned. It's all coming back to me.'

'Well do you agree to the Ericeira child being my bridesmaid?'

'Yes, if she'll come.'

'Oh, I think she'll come. By the way, look what they've sent.' She showed him a set of eight exquisite Blanc de Chine plates embossed with flowers.

'Good Heavens—they must have cost the earth! We shall have to have a cabinet specially made for them.'

'I thought we might eat our fruit off them.'

'But my dear, these are as fine as anything in the British Museum,' Jamieson said, looking horrified.

'Oh much better, I expect. I imagine these are from the darling Duque's own collection—he has masses, and he knows I love Blanc de Chine.'

'They must love you a good deal,' Jamieson said, looking thoughtfully at his fiancée.

In fact both Jamieson's rooms and Julia's flat were already beginning to list up with wedding-presents. Julia was slightly irritated to receive several presents with the monogram 'J. J.'. 'I never thought I should look like a whiskey—on my luggage, and everything,' she said rather gloomily.

'Haven't you got another Christian name?'

'No, just Julia.' She saw his face. 'Darling, I don't really mind a bit! I'll put up with anything to be Mrs. Philip Jamieson.' He kissed her; but said then—'Well, Miss Probyn, you get on with those invitations. You haven't lost my list, have you?'

'I never lose anything but my heart, and now you've got that,' she told him, provoking another kiss. 'And I've laid on a girl for

the invites. We ought to finish them in a week.'

But before the week was out Jamieson came round and reported to Julia that he would have to go away at once, for several days. 'I told you we'd rumours of another installation; now we think we're onto it, so I shall have to go. It's a great bore just now, but it can't be helped.'

'Where?' Julia asked.

'In the Scillies.'

Julia took fright. The Prof. was going to the Scillies. On an impulse—'Can I come too?' she asked.

'Why? Do you know the place?'

'No, but I'd like to come.' She was thinking whether she had better mention the Professor or not.

'Well, I'm always better with you than without you,' the man said. 'But I should have thought you would want to be here just now. Why do you want to come?' he repeated, looking rather keenly at her.

Julia felt much safer with Jamieson now than she had done when they were in Scotland.

'Mrs. Hathaway said the Prof. was going to dig in the Scillies this winter. If there's going to be any trouble, I'd like to be about.'

Jamieson frowned, and was silent for a moment or two.

'Dash!' he exclaimed at last. 'I hoped all that was over.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well naturally we have been working afresh on the poor old chap, and his record; it's always exceedingly difficult to *préciser* these things—so much is underground, and every sort of false lead; but it looks as though he never really helped the Russians to much purpose—just pretended to, because he was being black-mailed.'

'Do you mean he's cleared, from your point of view?' the girl asked eagerly.

'Practically, yes. He had really nothing whatever to do with that installation near his dig at Callernish, that we have found out; those types on the motor-cruiser surveyed the site, and then that trawler we met steamed in and installed the works.'

'But the garage man in Stornoway said the three men in berets went and talked to him.'

'Of course, but that may have been just to keep up the pressure

—compromise him afresh, if enquiries were made. The Russians are very strong on that.'

'That might explain why he was so odd and nervous when we went over.'

'Exactly. A man in his situation is nervous all the time, of everything and everyone. But they managed Clare Island without him; definitely he never went near it. So I hoped that he had managed to wriggle free. But those devils never let go,' Jamieson exclaimed angrily. He paused, considering.

'Yes, I think it might be a good plan if you came; he's probably less frightened of you than of most people. And if he's gone there it is really important to contact him and get him safely away before they do the dirty on him, somehow or other.'

'But why should they want to do the dirty on him?' the girl asked, frightened again.

'Dead men tell no tales,' Jamieson said harshly. 'For the dear Russians that is Rule Number One. He may have no tales to tell, but they take no risks. Is he there yet, do you know?'

'No, but Mrs. H. will.'

'Ring her up, then.'

Julia obeyed this command. Like many independent women, she didn't in the least resent a measure of peremptoriness from the man with whom she had decided to spend her life.

'Yes, he went off two days ago,' Mrs. Hathaway told her.

'Do you know where he's staying? Aren't there endless islands where one can stay.'

'Oh no, dear child. In *confort moderne*, only on two: St. Mary's, which is really the capital—the steamer and the little aeroplane both land there; and now there is that *Grand Luxe* hotel on Tresco. But I think he said he was going to stay at a flower-farm on some other island, nearer to where he wants to dig.'

'He didn't say which?'

'No, he was rather secretive. Why do you want to know?'

'Hold on,' Julia said, and put her hand over the mouthpiece of the telephone.

'Mrs. H. has no address for him. May I tell her we're going?'

'You'll have to.'

'We're going there,' Julia said down the telephone. 'Philip has to, and I want to be along.' No answer came. 'Are you there?' Julia asked. 'Did you hear me?'

'Yes.' The word came rather gaspingly, 'Julia, is there *more* trouble?'

'Not from this end; practically all clear. That's what we want to tell him.'

'Oh, I *am* so thankful! Could you come and tell me about it? When do you go?'

'Hold on,' Julia said again, and asked Philip.

'The day after tomorrow. Better give her our address—The Zennor Hotel, St. Mary's—and tell her to write at once if she hears where the old boy is staying.'

Julia passed this on.

'So soon? But can you come and see me tomorrow?' Mrs. Hathaway asked. 'Oh dear, I have people coming to lunch!'

'I'll look in about eleven-thirty. Bless you. Goodbye.'

'You went rather far,' Jamieson said temperately, 'saying it was all clear at this end. That was for *you*.'

'I only said "practically"' Julia pointed out.

'I see I shall have an argumentative wife,' Jamieson said, but with a smile. 'Oh well, intelligence and argument generally go together.'

'Gracious, you don't think I'm *intelligent*, do you?' the girl asked. 'God help you, my poor Philip!'

He looked at her with a curious expression.

'You asked me, the day we got engaged, why I thought you were nice,' he said after a pause. 'Humility is one of the most engaging qualities in the world, and I see you've got that too. Oh darling, you have the two best sorts of intelligence that exist: horse-sense, and *l'intelligence du coeur*. The so-called intelligentsia usually have *neither*.'

'Ah, I expect I was thinking of them,' Julia said cheerfully, though she blushed at his praise.

The Isles of Scilly—the inhabitants naturally object to their being referred to as 'The Scilly Isles'—lie out in the Gulf Stream beyond Land's End; they can only be reached by a small plane, which flips to and fro several times a day, or by steamer from Penzance. Jamieson and Julia drove down in his Bentley in one day; slept at Penzance, leaving the Bentley in a garage, and next morning set off on the steamer. The tourist season is practically over by October, and there were not many passengers; but they

noticed one little man with dark hair, a rather Jewish nose and a faintly green complexion, because he was so oddly dressed: sea-green whipcord trousers fastened under his insteps by elastic straps, a white wind-cheater, and dark glasses, although the day was grey and overcast.

'There's your Russian spy, to the life,' Julia muttered to Jamieson, with her giggle.

'Nonsense,' Jamieson replied—an automatic reflex from a man to the woman who is practically his wife. But she noticed that he went and had a gossip with a member of the crew; presently he returned to tell her that the little man was the newly-engaged chef at one of the hotels.

'Marvellous cover-job,' Julia said, undaunted. 'You keep your eye on him.'

Presently the boat entered that strange little archipelago, and Julia looked about her with interest. Many of the Islands were merely oddly-shaped piles of rock; the larger islands, eaten away by the restless movement of the waters round their shores, showed their structure diagrammatically: rock or gravel below an upper skin of dark soil only a few feet deep. This however was densely cultivated: the small dark fields between the high ever-green hedges which served as wind-breaks against the fierce Atlantic gales were either neatly ploughed, or showed thin faint green lines—the first leaves of the daffodils which, flowering in mid-winter, make the islands' fortune.

'I can't conceive how the Russkis can plant any installations here,' Julia observed. 'The soil isn't deep enough to hold their machinery, for one thing; and how can you put secret stuff in places where people are at work all the time? I think whoever put you on to this idea was dotty.'

The steamer drew in to the harbour at St. Mary's, and tied up beside the quay; houses stretched along the small bay, and climbed a hill above it on the right. Several motor-boats were moored at the quay; Julia noticed that the little man she had cast for the role of Russian spy got into one of these. A porter from the Zennor Hotel met them with a hand-barrow and wheeled their luggage along the quayside and through a stone archway; beyond this he directed them up some steps in a garden still bright with flowers.

The Zennor Hotel was a comfortable, straightforward place,

with good beds, good plain food, hot water, and friendly service. The pair had had a long hard drive down from London the previous day—nearly three hundred miles, and most of the way in pelting rain; and after a second early start from Penzance that morning Julia was glad enough to accept Philip Jamieson's suggestion of a rest in the afternoon. Afterwards they strolled about the little town. St. Mary's is a curious place, it has a character all its own: built up, much of it quite modern, it yet retains a flavour wholly unlike that of the mainland—the islanders' own highly idiosyncratic atmosphere.

They became more fully aware of this when after dinner they went down, as everyone does in St. Mary's of an evening, to have drinks at the Mermaid. Jamieson, untireable, had spent the afternoon taking a walk; he had been up to the 'Met.' Station, and also to the Radio Station—and had picked up some local gossip which amused them. When the English discovered that German bombers were coming in 'on the beam' to attack the South Coast, they closed the Radio Station; the Germans retaliated by bombing it, and other parts of St. Mary's as well.

The Mermaid, formerly a disused warehouse, has been converted with imaginative cleverness. A long bar runs down one side; on the other are settles and small tables. Steering-wheels off wrecked ships, slung from the ceiling, carry electric lights; a maritime wall-paper increases the nautical atmosphere. But this is real, not phoney. When Julia and Jamieson went in more than half the people drinking beer were men in peaked caps from the local Boatmen's Association, who run the launches from island to island, and maintain communications in this strange community, or bearded fishermen in long tasselled knitted caps. Dogs wandered about, sometimes wickedly lifting their legs to a central pillar with circular shelves, where people could park their beers; at the farther end a game of darts was in progress. A piano stood opposite the bar, with trays for glasses on its top and on the keyboard—drinking, and talk, are the real business of the Mermaid. But both Philip and Julia, sitting with their beers on one of the wooden settles opposite the bar, were struck by the impression of a 'classless society'—something completely native and spontaneous, created by the strong, odd personality of the islanders themselves.

Presently an oldish man came up and asked if he could sit

down by Julia. 'D'you know the Islands?'

'No,' Julia said, making room for the new-comer.

'Ah. Well you should go out to the Western Rocks and see the Great Grey Seals.'

'Goodness, are they here too? We've just been seeing them in the Hebrides.'

'The Hebrides? Where's that? This is the place for the Grey Seals,' the elderly man said, rather irritably.

'Oh well, I suppose they live all over the place,' Julia said amicably, bending her doves' eyes on the oldish man. She was about to ask about the Professor, but just then the trays of glasses were removed from the keyboard of the piano, a young man sat down and struck some chords, and a group of men gathered round him and began to sing in harmony. The singing was unexpectedly good; during it the elderly man went away, and presently she and Jamieson returned to their hotel.

Jamieson had armed himself with a guide-book to the Islands, and a small pamphlet about their antiquities; next morning at breakfast he said to Julia—'I think we might try St. Agnes. It's near a bird sanctuary, and people can take their own bedding and camp in a disused lighthouse; from the map it seems to have twin anchorages, separated by a sand-bar; so boats—I mean Russian boats—could come in whichever way the wind was blowing.'

Julia agreed, and presently they went down to the quay and boarded the motor-launch bound for that particular island. But there is one snag about the motor-boats which ferry tourists about the Isles of Scilly; they make fixed runs, and usually the visitor has a choice of being dumped on a given island for an hour, or at best an hour and a quarter, or else being left there for four hours or more. It was a grey disagreeable day, with a chilly east wind, and they felt disinclined to take a picnic lunch and shiver for four whole hours; they opted for the short trip.

From their point of view St. Agnes was a complete failure. There were the two anchorages all right, but both were overlooked by modern buildings on the smaller island beyond the sand-bar. As to the island itself, as they climbed up from the stone quay to the old lighthouse on the summit ridge—'But this is a built-up area!' Julia exclaimed in dismay. She was not far out. Houses and flower-farms cover most of the island. The old

lighthouse was shut and locked; enquiries evoked the information that no one was camping in it. They went down and looked at the small church on the further slope, and then scurried back to be in time for the launch. These island launches are small and open; the wind had increased, and quite a sea had got up—they were soaked to the skin with splashing spray by the time they got back to St. Mary's. They had hot baths before lunch, and decided to call it a day.

Over tea Julia took a turn at examining the guide-book—she was worried by this working quite blind.

'Look, Samson is an uninhabited island,' she said, 'and it seems to be full of tumuli and kists and things. Why don't we try there tomorrow? Besides, it has *black* rabbits. I'd love to see those—how extraordinary.'

'I'd much sooner see the Professor than any amount of rabbits, black or white!' Jamieson replied—he too was troubled by the vagueness of their search. 'I want to find him *quickly*. You never asked that old type about him last night.'

'No, because the singing began. We'll try again tonight.'

That evening Julia had better success.

'Don't let's sit; let's stand and drink,' she said. 'One's more accessible that way.' They stood near the central pillar, Julia occasionally stretching out her long leg and well-shod foot to kick a dog which came up with the intention of defiling it. One mongrel bared its teeth and snarled at her, but withdrew cringing—a middle-aged man, with a rather intelligent face, used the small occasion to accost her.

'Well done,' he said. 'More people ought to kick those tykes.'

'I don't like dirty dogs,' Julia said.

'You are so right! Are you staying here long?'

The stranger proved to be a flower-purchaser, who came down from London to book daffodils for the winter season, and knew the Islands well. Presently—'All these prehistoric remains; have they been fully excavated?' Julia asked.

'Oh no—there's a lot more work waiting to be done,' the man said. 'But of course no one can dig without getting permission from the Duchy Office.'

'What on earth is that?'

'The Office of the Duchy of Cornwall; they are really the landlords of the Islands.'

'Where does it hang out?' Julia asked vulgarly.
'Up on the Garrison. Why? Do you want to dig?'
'I might. Are they on the telephone?'
'Certainly. Duchy of Cornwall Office.'
'Oh thank you.'

At this point the part-singers started up again; Julia and Jamieson listened for a little while, and then left.

Next morning they went round early to the Duchy Office. Yes, a Professor Burbage had been given permission to dig on Samson, they were told. Did they want permits too? If so, they must produce credentials. Jamieson took over.

'I might want a permit later,' he said; 'for the moment I just want to see what is there—the Kist-vaen with the grooved slabs, for instance, and the tumuli. I am a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, and this lady is a friend of Professor Burbage's.'

As they walked away down the sunny little street—'What did I tell you?' Julia said. 'Samson it is.'

'We'd better take lunch—this will be a whole-day job,' Jamieson replied.

But by the time their picnic lunches had been got ready, and they hurried down to the quay, the boat for Samson had already left. Jamieson tried to hire a launch, but the St. Mary's boatmen like to stick to their routine; he had no success. An old fisherman, who had overheard the fruitless discussion, came up to the pair as they started back towards their hotel.

'There's the *Black Swan* from the hotel on Tresco, waiting for people off the plane.' He pointed to a large motor-boat moored below the quay. 'If you went over to Tresco on her you could get Hicks from Bryher to take you to Samson; he has his own boat. It's no distance to walk across Tresco from Old Grimsby to New Grimsby, and Hicks would come across for you if you telephoned—it's only three minutes from Bryher by water. If you waded at low tide it's more,' the old man said, chuckling.

This timely suggestion worked. Jamieson first asked a man with an auburn beard and a knitted tasselled cap on the *Black Swan* how soon he expected the plane passengers? Learning that they would not arrive for at least twenty minutes he walked rapidly back to the hotel, and set about telephoning to the Bryher boatman. Unluckily almost everyone on both Bryher and Tresco is

called Hicks, but the clever girl at the exchange was able to help—‘If you want a boat, it will be Vernon Hicks you’ll need. Hold on.’ ✈

Like Clare Island, the Scillies have radio telephones—impossible to keep cables in action among those surging tides—and soon Jamieson was talking to Mrs. Hicks.

‘To Samson, is it? And you’re coming over on the *Swan*? Wait a moment.’ Pause. ‘Yes, if you walk across to the quay, either my husband or my son will have the boat there for you. What name?’

‘Robertson,’ Jamieson said. After their two evenings in the Mermaid he already recognised that the grape-vine in the Scillies is almost as well-developed as that in the West of Ireland.

They scrambled on board the *Black Swan*. Today the sea was calm, and the air balmy; Julia and Jamieson sat on seats round the deck. Jamieson opened his map—‘That must be Tresco Abbey, there on our left,’ he remarked.

‘Aren’t there marvellous gardens there, that we ought to see?’ Julia asked.

‘Yes. We’ll see them when we’ve found the Prof.!’ he muttered.

The boat pulled up at a long narrow jetty. The man with the auburn beard helped the passengers ashore, and heaved their luggage up to a youth in charge of a small motor-trolley belonging to the luxury hotel. Julia, waiting her turn to be handed ashore, suddenly noticed the little man with the green trousers and dark glasses, whom they had observed on the steamer, emerge from the small cabin and nip ashore ahead of them.

‘There’s your Bolshie agent,’ she muttered in Philip’s ear.

‘Don’t be silly.’ But when they went ashore, instead of taking the road straight ahead to New Grimsby, he followed the trolley and the passengers to the right, along a track leading to the hotel. The passengers went in at a glass door; the little man bore away to the left, and disappeared into the back regions.

‘I can’t think why I’m silly,’ Julia said. ‘Here he is, at this hotel—just what that man on the steamer said, a chef.’

Philip turned away down the drive between the bright garden beds.

‘You’ve no proof of any of your ideas,’ he said. ‘We don’t know that he’s the chef, we don’t know that he’s an agent. Now, how do we get to New Grimsby?’

They returned on their tracks to the end of the jetty, and followed a road which led straight inland; it curved round a small church, and rose steeply uphill—when they reached the crest of the rise, there was the sea below them again, and another quay projecting into it—beyond the channel lay two rather bare islands. On either side of the road were fields of dark earth, the green shoots of the daffodils tracing faint lines across them; on the island immediately across the channel was a sizeable group of houses, and even green-houses, whose glass roofs glittered in the sun.

‘This is all quite dotty,’ Julia said. ‘Your people in London must be mad. How can there possibly be secret installations in a place like this? You might as well try to plant one in Ealing!’

‘Wait till we’ve seen a bit more,’ was all Jamieson said.

A small launch was waiting at the quay.

‘Mr. Robertson?’ asked the young man on the launch.

‘Yes. You’re taking us to Samson, aren’t you?’

‘That’s right.’

The launch, towing a dinghy behind it, shot away across the water; the young man, kindly anxious to impart information, pointed out to his passengers the exact route by which, at very low tides, one could wade from Tresco to Bryher. The launch pulled in to a small sandy bay on the east side of the north tip of Samson; the young man threw an anchor overboard, drew the dinghy alongside, helped Julia and Jamieson into it, and rowed them ashore.

‘How long will you want here?’ he asked.

‘Two and a half to three hours,’ Jamieson replied.

‘Good so—I’ll be back for you at half-past four.’

Samson is a long narrow island with two humps, one at each end, joined in the centre by a low sandy neck of land; Julia and Jamieson, standing on the North Hill, could see most of it, except the portion hidden by the bulk of the South Hill—on the nearer slope of this stood several roofless stone buildings. Philip adjusted his field-glasses and scanned all the slopes and the low shores; there was not a soul in sight, the whole island seemed utterly deserted.

‘We’d better go to the other end,’ he said, and set off along the summit ridge. ‘Oh, hullo, here are the tumuli’—he stopped to glance at four rather good specimens. ‘No sign that the old boy has been at work here, though. Come on.’

Down on the sandy neck joining the two hills they first saw the black rabbits. Julia was rather disappointed—‘They aren’t really black, they’re more gun-metal-coloured,’ she said. But she was delighted by the deserted village. The abandoned houses stand in an enclosure surrounded by a dry-stone wall five feet or more high, beautifully built; along its top small flat slabs are laid on low vertical ones, forming little windows, like a sort of lace trimming—the whole was covered with a fuzz of silvery-grey lichen, an inch or more long, giving the impression of the richest sort of velvet. Inside the entrance they came on two springs, each some three feet across, which had been carefully built up with stones to hold the water; they were rather green-mossed and weedy, but the water was beautifully sweet—Julia cupped her hands and sampled both.

‘Come on,’ Philip said again, rather impatiently, and they climbed up to the South Hill. This is very stony; the minute path winds round and between great bulwarks of living rock. The wind had begun to blow freshly from the west—‘Let’s get into the shelter and have lunch,’ Julia said. ‘I’m hungry.’

They sat on sun-warmed slabs under a high wall of rock to eat their sandwiches. Below them the hill fell away steeply to the sea and a stretch of marshy land along the shore, with a curious pool running into it.

‘Now you could plant something there,’ Julia said. ‘For once there seems to be some soil without daffodils in it. But do let’s eat in peace first,’ she exclaimed, as Philip began to get out his binoculars.

After lunch Philip insisted on using his field-glasse. ‘I must see what those birds are, sitting about in pairs down on the rocks in the marshland.’

‘Greater Blackbacked Gulls—even I can tell you that. Don’t you hear them yowking overhead?’ Indeed the sky above them was suddenly full of the huge wheeling creatures. ‘Hateful brutes!’ she said vengefully.

‘Why?’

‘Oh, they’re the cruellest predators in Britain. If a ewe gets cast in a gully they peck out her eyes; and they tear new-born lambs to pieces, as well as devouring young grouse.’

‘How horrible.’ But he was now looking through his binoculars. He gave a sudden exclamation.

'Hullo! Someone *has* been digging down there—near that pool. We must go and see.'

Julia begged for coffee first, but in vain; she bundled the Thermos, the cups, and the remains of their lunch into the carry-bag, and followed Jamieson down through the rocks onto the marshy flat land beside the sea. When she came up with him he was standing beside three holes in the boggy soil—one rather more than four feet square, one about fifteen inches, and the last a square of barely eight inches; they were a few feet apart from one another, and all half-full of water.

'There you are,' he said. 'The tracker, the batteries, and the hole for the aerial—they tried it out here, and gave it up.'

'Because of the water?' Julia asked.

'Almost certainly. Obviously a try, and a failure.'

'Why didn't they fill the holes in again?' Julia asked. 'That seems silly.'

'I suppose they thought the tourists wouldn't come down here. Anyhow you said yourself that the old Prof. *is* silly.'

'But I thought you said he was cleared, or practically,' Julia protested.

'I did. But I don't like this at all.' He frowned. 'It looks as if they were still forcing him to act as cover for their goings-on; we heard only this morning that he'd got a permit to dig on Samson.' He paused. 'We simply must find him quickly,' he said urgently. 'Absurd of the Duchy Office not to have got his address.'

Julia was troubled by Philip's evident unease.

'Might he be camping in one of those ruined cottages?' she suggested. 'He's a great camper-out.'

'We'll look.' But first Jamieson insisted on taking a cast round the lower, western side of the island, below the South Hill; they found nothing and no one, and struck up to the deserted village. To reach the cottages involved scrambling through brambles and bracken; but their search proved fruitless. There were no signs of camping in any of the ruins.

'Well that's no go—he's not here,' Jamieson said. He looked at his watch. 'Do we have to climb up that other hill again?'

As it proved they did not have to. From the far side of the sandy neck a small path led along the eastern shore only a few feet above the sea; they followed it. Julia was excited by the sight, first, of a pair of mergansers, swimming just off-shore, and then

by that of a pair of Great Grey Seals. 'Philip, look! There they are.'

'Come on,' he said briefly. 'If possible I'd like to catch that Office again before it shuts.' He hurried Julia along, past the famous rabbits—which here swarmed, and looked much blacker as they scurried over the white sand on the shore. The launch was waiting at anchor when they reached the little bay, and they were rowed aboard. Without difficulty Jamieson persuaded Mr. Hicks to take them back direct to St. Mary's; when they landed, and he had paid the very modest charge, they hurried uphill to the Duchy Office. It was shut.

Chapter 13

THE moment after breakfast next morning Jamieson went off to the Duchy Office to see if he could get more information as to the Professor's whereabouts. Julia stayed in the hotel, and occupied herself in washing her underclothes and Philip's socks and handkerchiefs. It gave her a quite new and peculiar pleasure to perform this wifely task for him; she had a better right now, she thought, than on the yacht. Practical women, staying in hotels, use the neat trick of smoothing wet handkerchiefs onto mirrors or windowpanes; this produces a very fair imitation of ironing after the articles have dried. Julia's room was at the front of the Zennor Hotel; as she stood at her window, pressing her own and Philip's handkerchiefs onto the glass, she noticed a group of people passing through the stone arch at the end of the quay—a boat must have come in from one of the islands. She glanced at them idly—and then gave a start. There was the Professor! Short-sighted as she was, Julia could not fail to recognise that tall, rather stooping figure, in the familiar stained burberry, with the old-fashioned fore-and-after stitched cloth hat. She threw up the window with a wild impulse to shout to him; but he turned sharp left along the street in front of the Mermaid, and was lost to sight.

The girl flung the rest of her wash into the bedroom basin, and raced downstairs, down the garden steps, round the corner and along the street. But of course she was too late—he was nowhere to be seen. She went into one or two shops—the tobacconist's, the chemist's—the Prof. was a great one for taking pills; but everywhere she drew a blank. She debated whether she should go on to the Duchy Office, but decided against that; Philip knew him by sight, and would see him if he should go there. She went back to the quay, and asked some of the usual loungers there where the boat came from that had landed about ten minutes ago? Two had come in then, she was told; one from Bryher, and the *Black Swan* from Tresco—but their crews had gone up into the town. Discouraged, Julia returned to the hotel, and finished dealing with her washing.

Philip walked in a few minutes later. No, the Duchy Office had no idea where the Professor was staying. All they could suggest was that they should enquire at the hotel on Tresco, quite close to Samson—'which we know for ourselves,' Philip said acidly. Julia told him what she had seen—'He's in this town, *now*. What ought we to do?'

They deliberated.

'He may be anywhere, doing anything,' Philip said at length. 'I don't think we shall do much good posting ourselves as a watch on the quay—so frightfully public, for one thing. I suggest we follow up the Office's tip and try the hotel on Tresco. He may even be on the launch.'

'Take lunch?' Julia asked.

'No, we can eat at the hotel. Save time.'

They just caught the Tresco launch on her return trip, and went straight to the hotel, where Philip booked a table for lunch. Then he asked if a Professor Burbage was staying there? No, nor had the receptionist heard anything of him.

'So much for that,' Jamieson said, as they walked out into the garden, where exotics like the great *Echium*, 'Pride of Madeira', stood about in the beds among more ordinary plants.

'Well what shall we do? We've got more than two hours. Go and see the gardens at the Abbey?'

'I don't think so—I'd rather have a scout round. Let's look at the map.' They found a seat, and Philip spread out his map across their knees.

'Yes, we'll walk north towards this Piper's Hole, and King Charles's Castle,' he said. 'I always like to have an idea of the lay-out.'

They took a small path up through the hotel gardens, scrambled over a stile in a stone wall, and found themselves suddenly in quite a different world. Here were no houses or daffodil-fields, only the open hillside; cows grazed in a pasture close to the wall, everywhere else the bracken lay thick and golden, like skeins of orange silk. The path led across the pasture, through another wall, and skirted a ploughed field; then it rose steeply to the spine of the island. This was open country indeed: ling grew sparsely between the endless rocks and stones, but what struck them both was that the whole hill was full of water—tiny streamlets ran everywhere, even down their little path, such as it was.

'Well, I suppose you could plant something here,' Julia said. 'It seems lonely enough.'

'Oh no you couldn't—in summer endless stout-hearted tourists come to look at The Piper's Hole. We won't bother with that—I'd rather look at the castles. They call one Cromwell's Castle and the other King Charles's Castle; of course these Islands were one of the last strongholds of the Royalists, till Admiral Blake knocked them for six.'

As they breasted the ridge the wind struck them like a blow—a gale was springing up from the west. They hurried across to shelter under the ruined walls of King Charles's Castle, the higher of the two; from here they could see the stout round tower and square block of Cromwell's Castle, projecting into the sea below them—beyond, part of another island, barren, rocky, and humped and necked like a sea-serpent, half-closed the channel between it and Tresco.

'What's that?' Julia asked.

'The north end of Bryher, and Shipman Head.'

'Goodness, there must be a sea on outside,' Julia said, as clouds of white spray rose high into the air above the two low necks on the opposite island. 'Oh, I should like to get onto Bryher, and see all that from close to.'

'We might do that tomorrow—we've got to try everywhere. We simply must find your foolish old friend.'

'Oh look,' the girl exclaimed suddenly—'there's a boat coming in.'

Indeed round the eastward-pointing tip of Shipman Head a trawler appeared; it crept into the comforting shelter of the channel between Tresco and Bryher, and cast anchor only a few hundred yards from where they sat—the strong wind brought the loud metallic rattle of the anchor-chain clearly to their ears as it ran out. Philip got out his field-glasses.

'French,' he said. 'Good luck to them. They'll be all right in here, poor devils. God, what a frightful place this is for sailors!'

'Hullo, here comes another!' Julia said—a second boat was hurrying round Shipman Head to seek shelter. She was a trawler too, but chose a different anchorage; she tucked in on the opposite side of the channel, close under the nearer of the two sea-serpent humps on Bryher. Jamieson focussed his binoculars on her.

'God-damn-it, she's a Russian!' he exclaimed.

'Well I don't suppose Russians want to be wrecked, any more than any other one,' Julia said, using the idiom of Mayo.

'I don't like it. We *must* find your wretched old Professor. Let's go and have some food, and get back to St. Mary's. The police, or *someone* must be able to find out where he is.' He was returning his binoculars to their case when Julia stayed his hand.

'Just a mo. Look down towards that round tower. Do you see what I think I see? I'm so blind.'

Philip, reluctantly, turned his field-glasses towards Cromwell's Castle. Just beside the round tower stood a small figure in green trousers and a white wind-cheater; he held a small flag in each hand, and was moving them systematically.

'Signalling, by God!' He watched. 'No, I can't make a thing of it. It must be in Russian—someone is signalling back from that trawler over on the other side.' He watched a moment or two longer, and then rose to his feet.

'Come on. This gets nastier and nastier—we haven't a moment to lose. You'd better ring Mrs. Hathaway from the hotel and see if she's got his address by now.'

'She hadn't when she wrote the day before yesterday,' Julia replied, as he pulled her to her feet.

'Had she asked him? You did tell her to, didn't you?'

'More or less—but Mrs. H. does what she thinks,' Julia said, hurrying after him over the rough path up to the ridge. They returned to the hotel by the way they had come, walking very fast; when they got in Jamieson ordered drinks in the pleasant little bar, and then asked Julia for Mrs. Hathaway's telephone number.

'Are you going to do this?' the girl asked.

'Yes. She might take me more seriously; and this is serious.'

'Well don't frighten her,' Julia said.

There was a telephone-box in the lobby by the reception-desk, and surprisingly quickly the girl at it sent Philip in to take his call to London—Julia, sipping her gin, waited on a chair outside. She was still rather out of breath after their race back from King Charles's Castle, and was longing to go and powder her face, and generally tidy up; but she waited to know what went on. The telephone-box was sound-proof; she could only hear the diffused noise of Philip's voice speaking. Presently he came out, slamming the door after him.

'Well?' Julia asked.

'Wait a minute.' He went across to the desk and asked the girl to have his call put on his luncheon bill, and to arrange to have their meal ready in five minutes; then he picked up his glass and ushered Julia out into the long glass-sided passage, cloaked with delicate exotic creepers, which gives access to the hotel.

'She had a picture-postcard from him this morning, with the postmark "Bryher", so that's where he probably is,' he said. 'We must get back and find out exactly where.'

'Bryher's not very big—that shouldn't be impossible.'

'No. But we may be able to get more details at St. Mary's—we'll try that first, anyhow. I'm getting sick of all this working blindfold!'

This was in fact a mistaken decision, though neither of them could know it at the time. If they had telephoned for Hicks's boat and gone straight across to Bryher that afternoon—only a matter of half an hour all told—everything might have turned out very differently. As it was, they went and ate a very good lunch in the dining-room, its huge windows giving onto the sea and some of those yellowish islets.

'Goodness, it's hot in here,' Julia said. Presently another idea occurred to her. 'Did you ask about the little man in the odd clothes, and whether he really works here?'

'No I didn't. What difference does it make where he works? We know what he's up to; we saw him at it. Hurry with that ice if you want coffee,' he said impatiently. 'The launch goes in half an hour.'

They gulped their coffee in the L-shaped lounge, whose huge windows also overlooked the sea. They just caught the *Black Swan*, and had a very rough trip back to St. Mary's; Julia, observing that she particularly disliked getting wet through on a full stomach, took shelter in a little cabin under the fore-structure.

'Are you feeling seasick?' Philip asked her.

'No—never seasick! But I'm always chilly after a meal.'

'"Eat till you're cold, live to grow old,"' he quoted, grinning at her. 'I bet you'll outlive me.'

'Oh, I hope so. I want to cherish you in your old age, when you're half-gaga, and fretful about your food, and can't remember people's names.'

'Is that your idea of marriage?' he asked, sitting down on the narrow seat beside her—her smile, when she uttered this dreary

prophecy, seemed to him one of the most beautiful things he had ever seen. •

‘Well it’s bound to be the latter end of most marriages, isn’t it? One’s seen it so often—and I’m a good bit younger than you.’ Again she gave that seraph’s smile. ‘But lots of fun before we get that length,’ she added.

Cabin or no—the gale, which the man in the knitted cap told Philip was of Force 8, whistled into and out of it—Julia did feel chilly when they got in, and went to have a hot bath, leaving Philip to conduct his enquiries by himself. She had already decided that in future the more she left him to do his work alone the better he would like it, and hence the better they would get on; which had now, for her, become the really important thing. He had drinks brought up to her room before dinner, and reported a nil result. The police didn’t know where Professor Burbage was staying on Bryher, and nor did the Post Office—he had given a *Poste Restante* address there, and collected his mail himself; it would be entirely against the regulations to give anyone’s actual address away, the Bryher post mistress had said, when Philip rang her up.

‘Oh what blah!’ Julia exclaimed, vexed.

‘No, those are the rules. She was quite within her rights.’

‘Yes, but *here*. It isn’t like London. *How* tiresome. Well tomorrow we must just go to Bryher and ferret him out. I bet we can, on the spot.’

After dinner, they went down again to the Mermaid. Julia felt unaccountably tired—in fact a strong gale, with its accompanying very low pressure, does of itself create fatigue in many people; she opted for sitting on one of the wooden settles to drink her beer. Presently a young woman, modestly dressed and modest in manner, came up to them.

‘I beg your pardon, but I wonder if I might speak to you?’ she said, addressing herself to Julia.

‘Oh yes, by all means. Won’t you sit?’

‘No thank you—I’m with a friend. But I’ve seen you here before, and I happened to be in the Post Office this afternoon when the gentleman came in asking about an old Professor that’s staying on Bryher. I come from Bryher, though I’m working here till the end of the season—I went home last Sunday, and I know where he’s putting up.’

'Oh, how good! Where?' Julia asked.

'Right at the top of The Town—a house called "Suntrap".'

'How kind you are. Thank you so very much. Won't you have a drink?'

The modest young woman refused a drink, repeating that she was with a friend, and melted into the crowd along the bar.

'Well that's a piece of luck,' Philip said. ✚

'I can't think why she didn't tell you in the Post Office—she couldn't be sure of seeing us here tonight.'

'Oh, dislike of officialdom! Here she could talk on the quiet.'

'Why did she speak to me and not to you?' Julia pondered.

'Your face, my dear, and your *ensemble*. She said she'd seen you here before; I expect she's been longing for an excuse to have actual speech with a woman in a Hartnell dress.'

'This isn't Hartnell—it's Hardy Amies.'

'Never mind—it's done its stuff. I'll just go over and check with some of those Boatmen's Association types about the earliest boat to Bryher.'

Julia sat beside her half-emptied glass of beer, worrying about the Professor. Was he now clear, or wasn't he? Philip must think he was, or he wouldn't be so desperately anxious to get him away before the Russians 'did the dirty' on him. But there was that Russian trawler anchored under Shipman Head at this very moment—it was unlikely that she would have moved out during such a gale; the barman had told them that it was now Force 9. But the men on board might manage to get ashore, and find the poor old man in 'Suntrap'—*what* a silly name! Oh, pray God she and Philip might be in time to get him safely away.

She lit a cigarette, trying to pull herself together. Presently Jamieson came back to their table. The launch for Bryher only left at 10.15; he had telephoned to Hicks and arranged for him to come over and pick them up at 9.30. 'Save at least an hour—we shall go direct. Drink up, dearest; I think you'd better get to bed. You look tired.'

Punctually at 9.30 next morning they found Hicks and his launch at the quay, went on board, and shot across past Samson, leaving Tresco on their right, to Bryher, where they pulled in below The Town. This is a rather grandiose appellation for the main centre of an island whose total population is under ninety souls, but so it is called. The tide was high enough for them to

land at the small quay—when it is low one lands by dinghy on a sandy spit—and they made their way through a small loose agglomeration of houses set among gardens, glass-houses, and daffodil-fields. Their boatman had told them where to find 'Suntrap': they should follow the small track which leads uphill and round through The Town till it descends again towards the sand-spit; 'near the top' they would find the house they wanted.

'What a nice place,' Julia said, looking about her at the neat white houses, the well-kept gardens, and the high hedges of purple Veronica or Pittosporum sheltering the fields of bulbs. As they approached a house near the top of the road, Jamieson paused—'That may be it.' At that moment an open front window on the ground floor was slammed down, a sharp sound in that quiet place, and a curtain was drawn across it. Jamieson took Julia's arm.

'Wait—he may have seen us. We don't want to startle the old boy.'

But it was too late. The door of the little house opened suddenly and out dashed the Professor, hatless; he raced away downhill along the further track.

'Prof.! Prof. darling, *wait*,' Julia called to him. 'Everything's all *right*.' He paid no attention, but ran on.

'He has still got the wind up,' Jamieson said. 'Come on—for all we know those devils are still at the far end. Can you run, with your leg?'

Julia said she could, and did; but the Professor showed a surprising turn of speed. Beside the spit the track became deep in sand, with marram-grass growing on the ridges, and old car-tyres and dead ironmongery about; Julia tripped on something and fell—they lost ground. The Professor gained on them still more where the sandy track emerges through a hedge onto the open hill; the gate is not very obvious, he knew it, and they didn't. By the time they got through onto the turfy slope, covered with bracken, brambles, and outcrops of rock, he was more than four hundred yards ahead of them, and close to the summit.

'Call again,' Jamieson said. Julia called with all her might, but the wind from the ocean carried any sounds away towards Tresco—the Professor still ran on.

'Hurry!' Jamieson exclaimed. Julia did her best, but her leg was now beginning to hurt her. They ran up the slope, and

paused for a second on the summit of the hill. Ahead of them stretched the long deadly curve of Hell Bay; the gale had slackened during the night, but huge green rollers were still coming in to burst in clouds of spray a hundred feet high on the dark sharp-toothed rocks; far out to the left, other mountains of white foam denoted the presence of the Scilly Rock.

'God, what a hideous place!' the man exclaimed. 'But there he is—can you run a bit faster?'

In front of them the land dipped down into a long wide depression, rising again to a much lower hill, very rocky—half-way across the dip they could see the Professor; he was now walking, but very fast—he glanced back over his shoulder, and when he saw them began to run again, but more slowly.

'Goodness, he is a mover! Whatever age is he?' Philip asked.

'Seventy.'

'Well I hope I'll be able to do as much when I'm seventy! But come on—that trawler is probably just over the next hill. Why on earth won't he stop?'

They raced down into the long depression, and ran across it. Driftwood had been flung up by the sea onto the pale turf, and in one place a sawing-horse showed that the inhabitants of Bryher cut it up for fuel; the sea had presented them with yet more fuel in the shape of lumps of the shallow skin of peat under the turf, ripped off by erosion, and flung ashore by the waves.

Over this easier ground they gained on the Professor. They passed through some curious rough megalithic walls, crossing the headland from West to East, and coated with silvery-green lichen—'Must come back and look at those sometime,' Philip panted; he too was getting out of breath. When the old man, his silvery hair standing up in the wind, crossed the summit of the hill they were less than a hundred yards behind him—Julia tried to shout again, but she had no breath left, and now she began to fall behind.

To understand what followed one needs to know the lie of the land between Bryher and Shipman Head. They appear to be connected by a narrow neck of rock; in fact a sheer-sided channel four yards in width and nearly twenty feet deep cuts clean through this, which is why the swarming tourists never get out onto Shipman Head—it is the one place in the Scillies where an installation could be planted, completely unobserved. From the

top of the small hill above the neck, which the inhabitants call 'Bad Place Hill', two tiny ill-defined paths lead steeply down over damp turf and patches of decomposed granite (one of the most slippery substances in the world) to a small rock-face sixteen feet or more high; this can be climbed down on the left by good hand- and foot-holds, or circumvented on the right by another minute path. But the descent from Bad Place Hill is very steep, and a person in a panic, running down those awkward little paths, might lose his head or lose his balance, and fail to take either of the safe, but slower, routes down to the neck itself.

The Professor must have done one or the other. When Jamieson topped the hill he was just in time to see the poor old man pitch headlong over the rock-face—as he fell he gave a loud cry. But Jamieson saw other things as well. The Russian trawler was still lying close in under Shipman Head, and a dinghy was drawn up by some sloping sea-weedy slabs a short distance beyond the further end of the neck. As Julia, slipping and slithering, tore past him down one of the little paths, some instinct, or his long training, caused him to move down off the sky-line and crouch close to the ground; even as he did so he saw a figure emerge from behind a group of lichen-covered rocks which mask the channel on the Bryher side, a revolver in his hand.

'Julia, lie down!—and don't speak,' he hissed at her. 'Get behind that rock.' Two or three large lumps of granite are perched at the lip of the little declivity—protesting, Julia nevertheless took cover behind one of these. From his position higher up Jamieson saw the figure with the revolver take aim and fire, deliberately, two shots towards the foot of the rock-face, where Burbage had fallen; then he turned round and ran away across the neck.

Not for the first time, Philip Jamieson wished passionately that it was not the normal tradition of his Service to go about unarmed. He remained still, urging Julia to keep quiet; the two of them could not, barehanded, take on the whole crew of a trawler, and a revolver might not be the only weapon carried by the Russians. In a few moments the man with the revolver reappeared; a light metallic clanging rose after him as he hurried away across the further side of the neck, and over to the slabs where the dinghy waited—as he got into it Jamieson heard the sound of the anchor being raised and the trawler's engine put on. Now he

went down to Julia—she greeted him angrily.

‘What is all this? Why must I hide? I’m sure the Prof.’s hurt himself, and I want to go to him. And what was that noise? It sounded like revolver-shots.’

‘We’ll go to him now,’ the man said. He moved out from behind the lump of granite and peered over the edge of the rock-face. Immediately below them lay the Professor, his body slack and motionless; blood was spreading slowly, in a dark stain, over a slab of rock on which his silvery head lay. Philip glanced round, and promptly spotted the little path which circumvented the declivity on the right.

‘I’ll go and see to him—you wait here,’ he said, guessing what he would find.

‘Nonsense! I must come.’

He realised that at this moment argument was useless, but he was faster than Julia over rough ground, and reached the body well ahead of her. Very gently and carefully he raised the head a little; the skull had cracked wide open when it hit the rock, and brains were mingling with the blood which spread so slowly over the granite. Whatever the man with the revolver might have done, it was the Professor’s fall that had killed him—the Russians were merely leaving nothing to chance. Jamieson took off his burberry; he had laid it over the corpse when Julia came up with him.

‘Let me see him! Why do you do that?’ she asked imperiously.

‘My dear, he’s dead—he fractured his skull on that rock.’

‘Are you *sure*? Oh please let me see.’

‘It won’t help you,’ he said gently. ‘He is dead—and it is rather horrid.’ But when she insisted he raised the burberry, and let her see what lay underneath.

‘Oh, the *poor* love!’ She knelt down and kissed the old face, still warm. ‘Why wouldn’t he listen?—why wouldn’t he wait?’ she asked miserably. ‘And why did he want to come *here*?’

Philip was wondering that himself. Had Professor Burbage been, at last, less afraid of his Russian tormentors than of his own country’s Secret Service? Had he indeed known that the Soviet trawler was there? Probably—but they would never find out, now. Suddenly he looked at the trawler, which was getting under way and moving out to sea past Shipman Head—he pulled out his notebook and jotted down her number. They hadn’t killed

the Professor, he had done that for himself—but it wasn't for lack of trying! While Julia still knelt, now murmuring prayers, beside the old man's body, her hands over her eyes, he looked at the clothing. Yes—two bullet-holes; but they were not very conspicuous; he hoped she wouldn't notice them. Leaving the girl to her prayers he walked along the neck of land, and now for the first time came on the sheer-sided channel which separates the Head from the main island; leaning against the further side, half in and half out of the water, was a light metal ladder. Ah—that was how the man with the revolver had got across. Why had he left it behind? Presumably he had spotted himself and Julia, most inconvenient witnesses to a quite unnecessary crime, and had abandoned it in his flight.

Instinctively Jamieson moved over to the western side of the group of rocks which masked the small chasm from the south, out of sight of the trawler, and took out his field-glasses to study Shipman Head—a place which, he now realised, was unapproachable except by water, and hence relatively tourist-free. The south-eastern side, facing him, was coated with deep soil, and full of sea-birds; he could see the puffins' burrows in the peaty turf, though at this season they were absent in the Southern Hemisphere—but gulls perched, floated on the wind, and wailed. His binoculars showed no sign of any digging—he didn't expect them to; this face of the headland was too visible. But on the farther side of Shipman Head, if anywhere, he would find what he had come to look for—and thanks to the Russian trawler's dinghy he knew exactly where one could land in sheltered water. At that moment an extra large wave broke on the rocky shore, drenching him with spray; it surged through the chasm, sweeping the metal ladder onto a slant against the further wall. Dash!—he would rather have liked to have a look at that ladder; but it was out of reach. Shaking himself like a dog, he wiped and put away his field-glasses, and went back to Julia.

She had replaced the burberry over the body, and was sitting on a rock, her hands loosely clasped in front of her.

'What are we to do with him?' she asked at once. 'We can't leave him here. Could we carry him to that little church in The Town? I'd like him to wait in a church till something is settled about the funeral.'

'No, we can't possibly carry him so far. I think we'd better go

and get the boat round, and take him to St. Mary's. There's a charming churchyard at Old Town, where most of the Scilly casualties are buried,' he said—'and I daresay he could wait in the little old church there; I don't think it's used for services now.' He was speculating, worriedly, whether there would have to be an inquest, and if so whether there was a coroner nearer than the mainland? All this would have to be coped with—and meanwhile his most urgent wish was to land on Shipman Head and find the installation as quickly as possible. 'Come on,' he said, and reached out to take Julia's hand and draw her to her feet.

'I'll stay with him,' she said quietly. 'You go and get the boat.'

'You're sure? Why not come?'

'Look at those bloody Greater Blackbacks!' the girl exclaimed. 'I'm not going to have his eyes pecked out! They're just waiting, like vultures.'

Indeed several of the hateful birds were circling and yelping in the sky overhead. Jamieson saw them, and then looked seawards—the Russian trawler had disappeared.

'All right,' he said. 'I'll be as quick as I can.' He stooped and kissed her. 'My love, I am so *sorry*,' he said.

Hurrying back towards The Town, Philip Jamieson thought hard about the next step. As on Clare Island, his instinct would have been to avoid involving the police, if at all possible. But obviously in this case it wasn't possible; they would have to go through with it. When he reached The Town he called in at 'Suntrap' and told the woman of the house that her lodger had had an accident—'I want to get Hicks's boat and take him over to St. Mary's.'

'Is it serious?' the good woman asked.

'Very serious, I'm afraid.'

'Oh, I am sorry. He's such a nice, quiet person.'

She showed him the way to Vernon Hicks's house. There he first asked for the boat to be got ready; luckily it was free, but the tide had gone down, and it would be necessary to embark from the sand-spit. Then he asked if he might use the telephone? The Hicks's house was less public than the Post Office.

'There has been a fatal accident on Bryher; an old gentleman has fallen and killed himself,' he told the police. 'Could you send someone over?—if you have a police-surgeon he should come too,

if possible, to establish the cause of death on the spot.'

The policeman at St. Mary's was very spry.

'You're speaking from Bryher?'

'Yes.'

'Did you see this accident yourself?'

'Yes.'

'When did it happen?'

'Just over an hour ago.'

'And who is speaking?'

There was now nothing for it but the truth. 'Colonel Jamieson. Look,' Jamieson said firmly, 'have you got a pencil and paper? Then take down the place. You know the neck between Bryher and Shipman Head? Well that's the spot.'

'You mean Bad Place Hill?'

'Precisely. How soon can your people be there?'

'I'll have to ring up the police-doctor. Where can I ring you back?'

'At Vernon Hicks's, if it's within the next ten minutes.'

'Okay. Don't touch the body.'

Mrs. Hicks, in and out of her kitchen, was troubled by what she overheard.

'Is it that nice old gentleman up at "Suntrap"? Oh, I *am* sorry. What happened to him?'

'He slipped,' Jamieson said. 'Bad Place Hill is really a bad place. But now I want to make a call to London.'

'London!' Mrs. Hicks exclaimed. Jamieson gave the number of his office, asked for a personal call to Captain Brown, and in an astonishingly short time was put through, and heard a voice he recognised saying 'Hullo?'

'Jimmy here,' he said.

'Oh, good. How are you doing?'

'I think I've got the place—I haven't actually inspected it yet. But there's going to be a bit of a hold-up. The old boy—you know who I mean?'—a sound of assent came down the line—'has gone and fallen over a cliff and killed himself. So there'll have to be an inquest, and all sorts of bother. Of course I've had to tell the police my name, as I saw the accident.'

'Obviously. Well never mind. How soon can you do your inspection? We're in rather a hurry over this, you know.'

'I do know. Perhaps tomorrow, anyhow as quickly as I can.'

'This isn't like anywhere else, you know,' Philip said rather impatiently. 'We're miles out in the Atlantic—I don't even know if there's a coroner here, or if one has to come from the mainland. Anyhow I shall have to attend the inquest, whenever that is. Now take down this number, will you?' He gave the number of the Russian trawler. 'You might tell our naval friends and let them look out for her.'

'Same lot as before?' the Captain asked.

'Yes, but a trawler this time. They didn't kill him, but I saw them try to. They might pick her up on her way home.' He looked at his watch. 'I must ring off; the police here will be ringing me back.'

'All right. Call me when you know any more.'

He had barely rung off when the call from the police on St. Mary's came through. The police-doctor and a constable were coming out at once.

'Good,' Jamieson said. 'Now you know where to come?'

'Yes.'

He wondered whether to ring up Mrs. Hathaway, but decided against it; Julia had better do that. Then he thought of food. It was now after half-past twelve. He asked Mrs. Hicks if she could possibly produce some bread-and-cheese? The admirable woman made up a parcel of sandwiches, with a screw of salt and a whole fresh lettuce. Armed with these, Philip went down to the sand-spit, and was rowed out to the small launch. Young Hicks asked where he wanted to go? Philip explained.

'That's an awkward place to land—it's much easier over on the slabs under the Head.'

Philip already knew this, thanks to the Russians, but kept his knowledge to himself.

'Yes, but when the police come they will have to get a body on board somehow—there's been an accident.'

'A body!' Hicks exclaimed. 'And are the police coming?'

'Yes—I hope they're on their way now. They had to get hold of their surgeon first.'

Jamieson was greatly pleased by the islander's reaction to this news. Of course young Hicks was excited and curious, but he showed a quiet sympathy as well.

'I hope it wasn't a friend of yours,' he said first.

'Not of mine, but a great friend of the lady I am engaged to.'

Hicks's niceness moved him to this frankness. 'It's that old Professor who was staying at "Suntrap",' he added.

'Oh, I *am* sorry. He was such a pleasant old gentleman—I took him over to Samson several times, for his digging. An archaeologist, wasn't he? But what happened to him?'

'He slipped as he was going down the further side of Bad Place Hill, and pitched over that little cliff and cracked his skull.'

'What a shame! I know the place you mean—if the swell isn't too strong I might get into the little channel; it'll just take this boat nicely. Then you and the police could lower the body down to me.'

Jamieson, still chilly in his damp clothes, soaked by the spray at the entrance to the channel more than an hour before, doubted privately whether this scheme would work; but all he said was: 'We'll see when we get there.'

Chapter 14

WHEN Hicks's small motor-boat nosed in towards the mouth of the channel another big wave came surging through, and pushed the metal ladder still further out along the rocks.

'Could we get in near enough to catch that thing with the boat-hook?' Jamieson asked.

'We'll try. You take the boat-hook into the bows, and have a go.'

The Scillonians are geniuses at handling their little motor-boats in difficult water. After two or three shots, each thwarted by the strong swell coming through, Hicks got his boat close enough in to the mouth of the channel for Jamieson to grab one end of the ladder with the boat-hook; the moment he did so Hicks backed expertly away into calm water, switched off his engine, and came for'ard to help his passenger to pull the object on board—he examined it with deep interest.

'Well I never saw anything like that before,' he said. 'Is it aluminium?—it doesn't weigh much. And it's collapsible—see?' He slid the two sections, each about thirteen feet long, together. 'Clever! I wonder how on earth it got here.'

'Someone who wanted to cross the gulley brought it, I expect,' Jamieson said. 'Anyhow it may come in useful for us to get across.'

Hicks, increasingly excited by this strange find, put on his engine again and motored over to the slabs under Shipman Head; there he cast anchor and they rowed ashore, taking the ladder with them in the dinghy. They carried it across the neck to that curious chasm, where Jamieson expanded it slightly, till it stretched from one rock wall to the other.

'Handy!' Hicks exclaimed. 'But will it hold?'

'We'll try. Keep it steady.' Jamieson ran lightly across the silvery rungs. 'Come on,' he called to Hicks, who crossed more gingerly, on hands and knees; they pulled the ladder across after them.

Julia was still sitting beside Professor Burbage's body. Jamieson asked young Hicks if he would like some lunch? 'No thanks—I

had my dinner early today.' He sat down on a rock a little distance away, while Philip went over to Julia.

'You've been rather quick,' she said.

'I tried to be. Now I think you'd better eat something'—he pulled their lunch out of his pockets. She looked pale and chilly—to his pleasure and admiration she agreed to eat, and munched away at Mrs. Hicks's sandwiches and lettuce.

'Where did you get this?' she asked.

'From his mother.' He nodded in Hicks's direction. 'She put it up while I was telephoning to the police.'

Julia looked vexed.

'Why on earth the police?'

'Darling, one has to report any accident to the police, and we saw this one happen.'

'Oh. Well I think that's all very horrid and unnecessary. Why can't he just be buried?' But to his relief she took a second sandwich. He touched her other hand.

'Dearest, you're icy! Are you very cold?'

'Well not exactly *warm*, with this hellish wind. But I'm all right.'

'Get up and move about,' he urged her. But at that moment Hicks called out. 'Here's the boat! But it's a strange doctor.'

The boat bringing the police-surgeon had just appeared. Hicks shouted to tell them where to land, and went down and held the ladder steady for them to cross the small gulf; Philip took Julia by the arm.

'Do go up and finish your lunch under those rocks on the ledge,' he urged her. 'It will embarrass them to have you here.'

'All right,' she said. 'By the way, did you notice those bullet-holes in his jacket? He can't have made them himself—he hasn't got a revolver, that I can see. I searched him, and there isn't one lying about.'

'Let the police worry about that.'

'But I told you I heard those shots.'

'I know. I saw the man who fired them; and I've given London the trawler's number already. But they didn't kill him.'

Police investigations usually follow a familiar pattern—but on this occasion the doctor was a stand-in for the local man, who was on holiday; he was rather startled at having to cross a chasm on a ladder to get to his corpse, to say nothing of the previous chilly

trip by boat. The police-constable at once tackled Hicks about the ladder—'Where did this come from?'

'The gentleman saw it in the gully, and fished it out with the boat-hook.'

'This chap that telephoned?'

'Yes.'

Jamieson let the doctor remove the burberry himself to make his examination.

'Who last saw him alive?' he asked presently.

'I did.'

'Where were you?'

'At the top of the hill—I came up just as he was running down the slope, and saw him pitch over that cliff behind us.'

The surgeon looked at the cliff; the constable measured it. 'Only seventeen feet,' he said.

'Yes, but if you fall seventeen feet and hit your head on a rock, you do to your skull what he's done to his,' the doctor said. 'No doubt about the cause of death.' Much to Jamieson's surprise he replaced the burberry over the body without any reference to the two bullet-holes; they were not very obvious, it was true.

The policeman was less easily satisfied.

'Why was he running?' he asked. 'A silly place to run.'

'I simply don't know,' Jamieson replied, half-truthfully.

'And what were you doing here?'

The regular police question—in this case, not easy to answer prudently. Philip chose his words carefully.

'My fiancée was a great friend of this gentleman's; we heard he was staying on Bryher, so we came over to look him up. That is how we came to be here.'

The constable was starting on a further question, but the doctor cut him short.

'Trelawny, all this can be dealt with later on. Let's get the body on board and back to St. Mary's.'

'Ah, you'd better—the tide'll soon be rising, and the wind's getting up again,' Hicks put in.

The small grisly procession trailed across the neck. Getting the poor body over the gully was something of a problem. Hicks ran to his dinghy and produced a length of rope, which was looped round the shoulders of the corpse; one man went ahead and pulled from the further side, while another kept the feet in position

—so that at no point were more than one and a half human beings resting their weight on the light metal alloy of the ladder.

‘I’m taking this,’ the constable said, when the job was done.

‘Well let my passenger use it first!’ Hicks retorted. ‘He got it, after all.’

‘That’s just what I want to know—where it came from,’ the policeman said suspiciously; he was not an islander, but a man from the mainland doing his two years’ spell of duty on St. Mary’s. Jamieson overheard.

‘Officer, would you be helpful and get the—er—corpse on board your boat first? As I’ve told you, he was a friend of the lady who is with me; I’d rather not upset her. We’ll take the ladder to St. Mary’s in Mr. Hicks’s boat, and bring it straight up to the police-station.’

‘Where’s this lady now?’ the policeman asked, rather sharply.

‘I asked her to wait up behind the rocks while the doctor was examining the body.’

‘Quite right,’ the doctor said. ‘Come on, Trelawny—give Thomson a hand with the corpse, and let’s get going.’

‘Just one moment, Sir. I must get the names and addresses of these witnesses. Did the lady see the accident too?’ he asked Jamieson.

‘Yes. And we are both staying at the Zennor Hotel; my name, as you already know, is Colonel Jamieson; hers is Miss Probyn. If you telephone we will come down at any time, and give you all the help we can.’

‘Can you identify the body? We haven’t even got his name yet,’ the policeman said.

‘Yes. He is—was—a Professor Alfred Burbage, an archaeologist; a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.’

Trelawny took this down in his little book. ‘Are you his next of kin?’ he then asked.

‘No.’

‘But you can swear to his identity?’

‘Yes, of course.’

‘That’s quite enough,’ the police-surgeon said. ‘For pity’s sake let’s get off—this wind gets right into one’s bones.’

It was getting into Philip Jamieson’s bones too. ‘Have you anything on the boat to cover the body with?’ he asked. ‘If so I’d like my burberry back.’

'Is this *your* burberry?' the policeman asked, looking suspicious again.

'Yes. I'll come over and take it; then we'll follow.'

'Right,' the policeman said rather grudgingly.

But young Hicks went and helped to embark what was left of Professor Burbage, and brought back Jamieson's burberry. 'There's very little blood on it, Sir, and that's on the inside,' the young man said, as he spoke giving the collar of the garment a wipe with his handkerchief. Once again Philip was touched by this sympathy and courtesy. He went up to where Julia still sat behind the rocks; when he took her hand it was warmer.

'All right—we can go back now,' he said.

'What have you done with him?'

'The police have taken him away.'

'Where to?'

'To their mortuary, I suppose.'

'Oh—can't he wait in that little church you talked about?'

'We can only see about that when we get back. Come on, darling.'

They too crossed the cut on the Russians' ladder, pulled it over after them, and chugged off to St. Mary's. When they arrived Philip urged Julia to have a hot bath and go straight to bed.

'I must ring Mrs. H.' she said.

'I should do that later—have a rest first.'

'What are you going to do?'

'Help to carry this ladder to the police-station—they want it.'

'Well do find out where the precious Prof. is. Get him some flowers if you can.' She went off to the hotel.

Carrying one end of the ladder along to the police-station in Hugh Town, as the main centre of St. Mary's is so delightfully called, Jamieson asked young Hicks if his boat would be free next day? Yes—and it was booked for 9 a.m. the following morning.

'I want to land on Shipman Head and have a look round, before we get too tied up with the inquest and all that,' he said. Young Hicks, with a discreet laugh, agreed—'Once they start they take their time,' he said. The day's events had been so unusual and exciting, compared with the quiet daily flow of island life, that the young man was delighted to keep in touch with one of the principals.

'Oh by the way,' Philip added, 'could you go up and see the landlady at "Suntrap" and get the old gentleman's bill? Then I can settle it when I come over tomorrow.'

'I'll do that.'

'Thank you.' At the police-station Jamieson said 'I'll take this thing in; you'll want to be getting back'—and Hicks went off.

In the station he found an older constable, who had been on St. Mary's longer, taking down notes from the young man who had come with the doctor to Bryher.

'Ah, that's what I wanted to see,' he exclaimed, as Jamieson propped the ladder against the wall. 'Now where did you get that, Sir?'

'Pulled it out of the water with a boat-hook from that little gulch between Bad Place Hill and Shipman Head.'

'How did it get there?'

'I don't really know.'

'*You* didn't take it there?'

'No.'

'Have you any proof of that?' The ladder, such an unwonted object, had obviously become a focal point in their investigations in the minds of the St. Mary's police.

'Yes. Young Hicks took us over to Bryher this morning—the first time I ever set foot on that island—and he knows we hadn't got it with us then; also he saw me fish it out of the water.'

'Ah. Where is young Hicks, by the way?'

'Gone back to Bryher.'

'That's a pity,' the elderly constable said. 'But we can always get hold of him. And where is the young lady?'

'She's gone to rest; she is very much upset. I should be grateful if you don't need to trouble her today. But I am entirely at your disposal to answer any questions as fully as I can,' Jamieson said rather formally.

These followed the usual routine. His home address?—and his profession? Philip gave the curious official reply, now regrettably current: 'I belong to a department under the Foreign Office.' Julia was easier—'A lady of independent means.' And what did he know about the deceased? An archaeologist, who had come to the Islands to dig—'You can check that with the Duchy Office; they gave him a permit.' The policeman was just in time to do this, and was satisfied with the reply he got.

'Well that's all quite straightforward,' he said. 'Do you know where he was staying?'

Jamieson told him about 'Suntrap'.

'And can you or the lady identify the body?'

'Goodness, we'd done that long before I even telephoned to you!' the Colonel said rather impatiently. 'And I gave full details to the constable. By the way, what have you done with him?'

'He was taken to the hospital. I rang up the Coroner and reported, and he told me to direct the doctor to do a post-mortem. I suppose he's doing it now,' the elderly constable said. 'In this small place I act as the Coroner's officer,' he explained.

'Where will the body be put after the post-mortem?' Jamieson asked.

'In the hospital mortuary.'

'Could one take flowers there?'

'I don't see why not—only there aren't many flowers here at this time of year—it's too early,' the elderly constable said. In Scilly 'flowers' mean primarily daffodils, and little else; but Philip, after leaving the police-station, took a walk through the outskirts of the town, and persuaded a woman with a pretty garden to cut him a bunch of chrysanthemums for a small sum; these he left at the hospital, with instructions that they were to be placed on the corpse in the mortuary.

'Which one?' the girl who answered his ring at the door-bell asked—'The old woman who died of a stroke, or the old gent that the police have brought in?'

'The old gentleman,' Jamieson said, and hurried away. He very much wished to avoid a further encounter with the doctor. If he had been carrying out a post-mortem he must have found the bullet-holes in the body, and more interrogations might hold up his own trip tomorrow to Shipman Head. He managed to pacify Julia by telling her that he had taken flowers, and then asked if she had told Mrs. Hathaway?

'Yes. She's coming down by sleeper tonight, and I've booked a room for her here—very nice, close to mine.'

'Good. She must have been very troubled,' he said.

'Do you know, I believe she's *thankful*,' Julia replied. 'She said—"Well, it's over at last, and now he's at rest." Really I agree,' the girl added.

To Philip's relief the police left them alone that night, except for a telephone call to say that they would be informed of the date of the inquest, and requesting them not to leave before then. So sharp at nine on the following morning Philip was down on the quay—Julia had to stay to meet Mrs. Hathaway.

'What are you after?' she asked him at breakfast, when he told her of his trip.

'I've made a guess, and I want to check on it.'

'About *it*?'

'Yes, dearest. Give Mrs. H. my love in advance.'

The wind had lessened again—in the Scillies it blows up and blows down—and the little boat bounced gaily over the green waters to Shipman Head. The tide was still high, and young Hicks had some difficulty in depositing his passenger on the slabs; but Jamieson managed to scramble ashore.

'All right—I'll come down and shout when I'm ready,' he called, and set off to hunt for the installation.

It was a nightmarish task. He made for the second of the two necks which give that end of Bryher the appearance of a sea-serpent; but this one is completely covered with scattered rocks, a quite impossible place. He climbed, stumbled, crawled and slipped over and between vast lumps of granite coated with an extraordinary black-and-white lichen three inches long, trying to make his way round to the further side of the Head; after he crossed the neck the wind, even if less strong than yesterday's, hit him in the face, and spray too. Philip began to despair; he could never find what he was seeking in this wilderness of rocks—and anyhow with no soil, how could the sort of installation he was familiar with possibly be planted? And then suddenly, barely two hundred yards in front of him, a little aerial mast rose up—only this time it was painted greenish-grey, to match the lichen-covered rocks about it. He hurried forward; he knew the aerial usually stayed up for about five minutes to make its report to Moscow, but it was no good breaking his leg or his ankle, or he would never get back. He was just about on it when the tiny mast sank down again—and on that terrain, two hundred yards in five minutes was quite good going.

Slowly, carefully, he moved forward. Ah!—there was the socket for the aerial, bedded in some sort of cotton-waste, surrounded by hay, in a cleft between two rocks. He was able to

trace his way to the metal box containing the tracking mechanism because the boulders—here much smaller—had been disturbed to lay the connecting cable, and some of them replaced the wrong way up, showing not the long hairy lichen but the bare granite. Yes, here was the shallow plastic cover; but some blasting had been done to make a big enough hole—chips of broken rock lay strewn about. The tracking mechanism had also been bedded in hay and cotton-waste; and more displaced rocks led him to the long-life batteries.

Enormously relieved by his good luck in having found it, Philip Jamieson sat down and lit a cigarette. He first made some notes in his little book, in his small, neat handwriting; then he got out his prismatic compass to take bearings. The blunt bulk of the Head rose up behind him, but from where he stood it was hard to see which was the highest point. However, the rock-encumbered neck he had crossed gave onto a small bay facing north-west, with headlands enclosing it; he took bearings on these, jotted them down, and made a rough guess at the height of the installation above high-water mark, which he also recorded. Then he sat down and smoked again, and reflected. Probably he would have to come himself and lead the mopping-up party to the spot—but could he be sure of finding it again, even with compass-bearings? After some deliberation he decided to take a chance on leaving signs to mark his route; the Russian trawler was not very likely to return at all soon—if indeed she had not already been intercepted by some patrol-boat. So on his way back across the neck of land he tore off, here and there, a strip of the long-haired lichen from the taller boulders, leaving a small inconspicuous series of ‘blazes’ which would help him, at least, to find his way back.

He got Hicks to put in at The Town, and went up and paid the Professor’s bill at ‘Suntrap’. The landlady was in great distress. ‘You didn’t tell me he was *dead*,’ she said reproachfully.

‘We had to wait for the doctor to be sure.’

‘Well, I’m awfully sorry. He was so nice and quiet—never any trouble.’ She receipted her little bill. ‘Well thank you very much, Sir. But all I did for him was a pleasure.’

‘I’m glad to know that,’ Jamieson said—he was thinking that Julia and Mrs. Hathaway would be glad to know it too.

He found them both when he got in, considerably late for

lunch. 'We'd given you up, so we started,' Julia said.

'Yes, I'm sorry.' He asked Mrs. Hathaway about her journey, and hoped her room was all right?

'Yes, delightful. But I should like to see *him* when I can.'

'I'll try to arrange that,' Philip said.

'Oh by the way, the police rang up this morning—they want to see you again,' Julia said. 'I told them you were out, but I said I thought you could be down by three. That all right?'

'Yes. Just give me time for coffee. Mrs. Hathaway, I'll see what I can arrange—meanwhile I hope you'll take a rest.'

When Philip Jamieson got down to the police-station he found the stand-in police-surgeon as well as the two constables; two revolver-bullets lay on the table, in a small box.

'I found these in the body,' the surgeon said. 'I think the constable would like to ask if you can throw any light on how they came there.'

The elderly constable dutifully gave the usual police warning: 'Anything you may say may be used in evidence.'

'Thank you; but that's all right. Go ahead.'

'Have you any idea when and how these bullet-wounds were inflicted?' the doctor asked, looking rather disapprovingly at Jamieson's untroubled, sensible face.

'Yes. I saw the man who fired the revolver—about one and a half minutes after the Professor had fallen, I should say.'

The young constable was taking down his notes: the police-doctor was silent for a moment—he evidently realised the implication of Jamieson's words.

'Who was this man?'

'I don't know. He came off a foreign trawler that was anchored close by, and after firing those shots he returned to her in a great hurry, leaving that ladder behind him'—he pointed to the ladder, which was still leaning against the wall. The young policeman looked up, goggling with interest, at this piece of information.

'What happened to the trawler?'

'She steamed off—also in a great hurry; she was weighing anchor while the man with the revolver was running back to the slabs to get on her dinghy.'

'Did you get the number of the boat?' the elderly constable asked.

'Yes—and I had it communicated to the Admiralty.'

'When?' the constable asked, looking startled.

'I rang up from Bryher immediately after I had telephoned to you to report the accident, Officer,' Jamieson said.

'Can you give me the number?'

'Yes.' He pulled out his diary, in which he had taken the precaution of copying the number from his little notebook; Jamieson was familiar with the police of many nations, and knew their passion for impounding documents—his notebook they must not have. He gave the number, which the young constable took down.

'Could I have that diary, Sir?' the constable, so predictably, asked.

'Well yes, if you don't keep it too long. I'd like to have it back after the inquest, because all my engagements are written in it, and when I return to London I shall need it.'

'I'll see that you get it back,' the doctor put in. 'But just one more point, Colonel Jamieson. Have you any idea why this man off the trawler should have fired at the deceased—since, as you obviously realise, he had already killed himself by his fall?'

'I can only make a guess,' Jamieson said carefully. 'I think the trawler was Russian, and they are people who leave nothing to chance. Anyhow the man who fired the shots could not have known for certain that Professor Burbage was already dead.'

The elderly constable spoke.

'It's interesting that you think the trawler was Russian,' he said. 'Of course we asked the Penzance police to get on to Scotland Yard to try to find out anything they could on the old gentleman's background, and it seems he was in Russia at one time. Can you confirm that?'

'Of my own knowledge, no.' Philip was thinking how best to protect Mrs. Hathaway from police enquiries. 'But I have heard it mentioned,' he said.

'Where? And who by?'

'Various sources in London. Professor Burbage was an international figure as an archaeologist.'

The constable left that for the moment.

'Had you any other reason for thinking that the trawler from which the murderer came was Russian?'

'Some reason, yes. Two days ago, on Tresco, I actually saw that trawler come in and anchor under Shipman Head.'

'Nothing odd about that,' the constable interrupted—'there

was a terrible gale blowing up that day.'

'Quite so.' Jamieson quietly ignored the interruption. 'But I also saw a man down by Cromwell's Castle semaphoring to this trawler, and getting replies; and I could not understand their signals. I know French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic—but not the Slav languages. So I concluded that the trawler was either Polish or Russian.'

The constable was rather taken aback by this display of knowledge. His only language was English. He very sensibly concentrated on something verifiable—the man who had been signalling from Tresco.

'Could you identify him?'

'Certainly. We came over from Penzance on the same boat, so I noticed him.' Jamieson described his fellow-passenger in some detail.

'What was he doing on Tresco?'

'Someone on the *Scillonian* said he was going as chef to the hotel there.'

'Late in the year for them to be getting a chef—it's the end of the season; they're just about to close,' the constable said. 'Excuse me a moment'—he used his telephone. The others waited.

'Well, he's gone—he left on the plane today,' the constable said. 'Pity you didn't tell us this yesterday, Sir.'

'I'm sorry,' Jamieson replied courteously. 'We were rather concentrating on the Professor, and I'm afraid I never thought of it.'

'Oh well, we can probably have him traced—his train won't get into Paddington for a couple of hours yet, if he's gone by train.' He used the telephone again; meanwhile the police-surgeon spoke quietly to Philip.

'You realise that there will have to be an inquest? In my opinion death was undoubtedly due to the fractured skull, which you say took place about one and a half minutes before the revolver was fired?'

'About that. He fell, and cried out; it was a minute or more later that the man came from behind the rocks, and fired at him, and ran away.'

'Did you check the exact time?'

'No, Doctor!' Jamieson said curtly. 'When I saw a man using

a revolver I got down off the sky-line! But there was an appreciable lapse of time, which I put at one and a half minutes.'

'Will you say that on oath?'

'Certainly. Which makes those bullets rather irrelevant,'—he gestured towards the table. 'It may have been attempted murder, but it wasn't murder—since the Professor was already dead.'

The constable had finished his call to the mainland.

'Well if he goes by train he'll be found,' he was saying, when the telephone rang.

'Is that the police-station at St. Mary's? Can Colonel Jamieson take a personal call from London?' The constable, looking irritated, put his hand over the mouth-piece.

'There's a call for you from London, Sir.'

Jamieson took the receiver. 'Hullo? Jimmy here,' he said.

Captain Brown's familiar voice answered.

'Oh, good! We tried your pub, and were told you were at the police-station. Really these personal calls are something! Look—that trawler was overhauled, but she scuttled herself.'

'No!' Philip exclaimed.

'Yes. But most of her crew, if not all, have been picked up; they're being taken into Plymouth or Falmouth—not sure which, yet; anyhow they'll be sent up to London. When would you be able to come up and identify the type with the revolver?'

'That rather depends on when the inquest here takes place.'

'Oh, there is to be an inquest? I'd better get on to the Home Office. Who's the Coroner? Someone local?'

'I think so. But you must find out who it is.'

'Right. Any more news?' Brown then asked.

'Yes. I've found what I was looking for. I'll write tomorrow.'

'Oh, why write?' Captain Brown said. 'If you can lead our friends to the spot I'll have a boat with a party sent at once. To St. Mary's, I suppose? Splendid! Then we can have the Scottish places dealt with simultaneously, and I'll get something fixed with Dublin. Well done, Jimmy. Ring me when you can come up.'

The other three men had listened with interest to Jamieson's end of this conversation, all they could hear; when it was over he apologised for the interruption. 'Sorry—the office wanted me.' He reflected for a moment, and decided to pass on at least part of his information. 'The Navy picked up that Russian trawler,'

he said. 'She was—er—sinking, but they rescued most of her crew. So presently I shall be wanted in London to identify the man with the revolver.'

'That's smart work,' the elderly constable commented. He was both delighted at the prospect of a would-be murderer being brought to justice, and impressed by the fact that this man Jamieson, whom he had hitherto felt bound to regard with a certain suspicion, had been able to lay on the Royal Navy to such purpose, and so fast. He looked at the Colonel with a new respect. After a pause the police-surgeon spoke.

'I take it, Colonel Jamieson, that you would like to know when the inquest will be—since you will be wanted in London?'

'I should, very much.'

'Then I'd better get onto Mr. Robinson—in fact it might be as well if we had a little consultation with him. Trelawny, you'd better go and start typing out your notes.' Reluctantly, the young constable left the room.

The Coroner was out—he was expected back at about five-thirty. 'Tell him to ring me up—Doctor Richards speaking—when he gets in,' the police-surgeon said, and looked at his watch. 'Time for a cup of tea,' he observed. 'Will you come and have one with me?' he asked Jamieson.

'You're very kind, but really I think I ought to get back to my friends. I'll be down here at five-thirty, if you want me. By the way, will the corpse remain in the hospital mortuary till after the inquest, or can it wait in the little church at Old Town?'

'Oh no,' the senior constable replied, without the smallest hesitation. 'Respectable corpses always stay in the hospital mortuary—only the others are put in the church at Old Town.'

'What are un-respectable corpses?' Jamieson asked, amused and curious at this highly peculiar distinction.

'Very decomposed ones, washed up by the sea, that fish or crabs have nibbled at,' the constable said bluntly. 'We get a fair number of those, and they smell much too bad to be on the hospital premises.'

This gruesome information fascinated the Colonel—the Scillies, as he had already told Brown, were really unlike anywhere else. He went back to the hotel, where he found Julia and Mrs. Hathaway having tea.

'Yes, I'm sure I can arrange for you to see him,' he said in

reply to a question from the old lady. 'He's in the hospital mortuary—it's not far away.'

'Why can't he be in the old church?' Julia asked.

'That's very seldom used now, I find,' Jamieson said cautiously. Julia, always pretty quick, realised that he did not wish to be pressed on this.

'And when is the inquest to be?' she asked.

'Don't know, yet—the coroner was out. I've got to go back to the police-station at half-past five, when he's supposed to be showing up. Give me some tea, darling—I see you cleverly got a cup for me.'

But after tea Philip led Julia aside.

'Who is the Prof.'s next of kin?'

'I never heard of his having any kin,' the girl replied. 'Both his parents were only children, so he had no cousins, or nephews and nieces. Why?'

'Oh, they may want to know. Usually it's a relative who identifies a body.'

'Well I never heard of his having any relatives, except an old 5th cousin in New Zealand, and she died last year.'

'Good enough.'

Just before five-thirty the Colonel walked down through Hugh Town to the police-station, in the deepening dusk; the street lights shone on the fronts of the pleasant granite-built houses. He found Doctor Richards and the two constables—as he entered the telephone rang. The senior constable handed the receiver to the doctor—'The Coroner, Sir.'

'Oh, Mr. Robinson, could you possibly come down to the station? I've done your post-mortem on that accident, and it's rather important to fix a date for the inquest pretty quickly. I have the principal witness here.'

'I shall be with you in three minutes,' Mr. Robinson said—and in precisely three minutes, in he walked. After greeting Doctor Richards and the constable he turned to Philip. 'Colonel Jamieson?'

'Yes. How do you do?'

The Coroner was very prompt, and very clever—cleverness is far from being a universal feature among coroners. He first studied the young policeman's notes, and then asked Jamieson for an account of the accident; he examined the two bullets, and

heard the police-doctor's report on the post-mortem.

'Yes. Well I shall sit without a jury,' he said. 'No doubt about the cause of death, in spite of an attempt at murder by a subject of a foreign power. That can be dealt with later—I shall sit tomorrow, and then I may adjourn. Will that suit you?' he asked, turning to Jamieson.

'Very well indeed, Sir, if I can go up to London during the adjournment.'

'Of course you can—you'll have to, to identify this creature,'

Both Doctor Richards and the old constable were rather astounded by all this. The constable, at least, had never known his Coroner to behave quite so arbitrarily before. Jamieson could not repress a grin—Brown obviously *had* got through to the Home Office.

'Very well,' Mr. Robinson said, getting up. 'Eleven-forty-five tomorrow. And Bolitho, *nothing* of this to the press. Is that clear?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'Can you identify the deceased yourself?' the Coroner asked, turning to Jamieson.

'Certainly. I have already done so, in the presence of the constable and Doctor Richards.'

'Well, since you actually saw him fall I don't think we need call any other witnesses, except perhaps his landlady on Bryher, who was the last person to speak to him. Bolitho, have you got her address?' Jamieson gave it, and the little receipted bill, to the constable. 'Right—send some boat over to fetch her,' the Coroner said.

'If young Hicks brought her he could say on oath that this gentleman really fished that ladder out of the water, Sir,' the constable said, looking lovingly at his cherished 'Exhibit A', still propped against the wall.

'Not necessary. Colonel Jamieson will say on oath that he did so. But there's no reason why Hicks shouldn't bring her—save two trips. You see to that, Bolitho.' He rose.

'One moment, Sir,' Jamieson interposed.

'Yes?'

'A very old lady, a close friend of Professor Burbage's, came down last night from London; she very much wishes to see his body, and take flowers and so on. Could that be allowed?'

'Oh, I think so. Where is she staying?'

'At my hotel—the Zennor.'

'I'll come with you, and see about it. Good night, Bolitho; good night, Trelawny.'

Two 'Good night, Sirs' followed Jamieson and the Coroner out into the street.

'I should like to have a word with you,' Mr. Robinson said. 'Perhaps better not at your hotel—could you come up to my place?'

In his warm comfortable room Mr. Robinson offered the Colonel a whisky—'It's after six.' When he had filled their glasses—'I had a call from the Home Office,' the Coroner said.

'I imagined you had.'

'Yes. They asked for a week's adjournment, and said everything was to be played down, and the Press kept out of it—if one ever can keep the Press out of anything!' Robinson said sourly. 'I gather you are in Intelligence?'

'Yes.'

'Have you found something here?'

'Yes.'

'Can you tell me what, or where?'

'I think it would probably be more convenient for you if I didn't,' Jamieson said with his agreeable grin; 'even though you are, so wisely, sitting without a jury.' (He guessed, but didn't say, that this also had probably been arranged on an intimation from the Home Office.) 'Anyhow it's highly classified information,' he added.

Robinson grinned back at him.

'You're probably right. I shall hear in time; in the Islands one hears everything, sooner or later—generally sooner! We have lived here for so many centuries by our eyes and ears, using our wits and risking our lives, that we have become rather sharper at observation than you comfortable stodgy mainlanders.'

'I think you've also remained much nicer,' Philip Jamieson said sincerely; he spoke of the reaction on Bryher to the Professor's death—Robinson was pleased.

'Yes, they're nice people. Tough as hell and obstinate as mules, of course, if you get across them in any way—but they have nice instincts still.' He paused. 'Now, when would your old lady like to go to the mortuary? Tonight, or tomorrow morning before the inquest?'

‘I think tomorrow would be best. She will be tired tonight, after her journey.’

‘Very well—say ten-forty-five tomorrow. That not too early?’

‘No, that will do perfectly, I’m sure. Thank you very much. I’m glad you don’t want to call her.’

‘No need, that I can see. You say you can identify the body, and if your people want me to have any more facts about the old gent, they’ll get the Home Office to pass them on.’

Chapter 15

JULIA was hanging about when Jamieson got back to the hotel.

'Is it all right for her to see him?' the girl asked. 'She's in rather a fuss.'

'Yes—tomorrow, at a quarter to eleven; the inquest is an hour later.'

'Oh good. The hotel people here have got hold of some lovely flowers for her. Will she have to show up at the inquest?'

'No—nor will you. The office got onto the Home Office, and they've spoken to the Coroner. No jury, and an adjournment.'

'Goodness, does that mean he can't be buried for a week, of whatever the adjournment is for?'

'I never thought of that—I've no notion. I should imagine that once the body has been identified, and the cause of death given by the doctor after a post-mortem, he could be buried. But I'll find out.'

'What do they want an adjournment for, anyhow?'

'The Navy has mopped up that trawler, and her crew are being taken to London. If I can identify the animal with the revolver he may be tried for attempted murder.'

'Could you identify him?'

'Yes, if he survived. She scuttled herself when she was overhauled, and they're not sure if they picked up the whole crew. I expect his dear chums shot him, anyhow,' Jamieson said coldly.

'Oh.' Julia was thinking about Mrs. Hathaway. 'Do you think there'd be time for us to nip down to the mortuary before supper, and see that it's all tidy and nice?' she asked.

'Not before, no—it's nearly seven now. We'll go down afterwards, when you've settled her into bed, and see to it then.'

They did this. Mrs. Hathaway was tired, and glad to go to bed early. Julia saw that she took her sleeping-pills, and read a psalm to her—'Better than any tranquilliser, if people only knew,' she said to Philip when she rejoined him in the hall.

But nothing could have been nicer than the hospital mortuary

—small, simple, bare, clean. The old woman who had died of a stroke had been buried that afternoon, and the mortal remains of Professor Burbage had the little place to themselves, flanked by Jamieson's chrysanthemums, and a small bunch of late asters.

'I wonder who brought those?' Philip speculated—'I didn't.'

'A lady from Bryher sent them over,' said the nurse who had taken them in. 'I think the old gentleman had been staying with her.' Once again, Philip thought what nice people the Islanders were; out in the street he told Julia of the 'Suntrap' landlady's distress, and quoted her words.

'Sweet,' Julia said. They strolled along the street; the wind had fallen dead calm, and the air was balmy, with the sweetness and purity peculiar to the Scillies.

'Darling, would it be awful if we went into the Mermaid?' she asked. 'I do feel like a beer.'

'Not awful in the least.' Philip felt like a beer too. But in fact this was an unfortunate move. There was a little stir of interest as they walked in; the big room was full of people, and when they had found a place to sit down with their beers the young woman from Bryher, who had given them the Professor's address only two evenings ago, came over to them.

'How terrible about the old gentleman,' she said. 'I hear he had a fall, and killed himself. Did you manage to find him first?'

'No—we were too late,' Jamieson said. How right the Coroner had been about everything in the Islands becoming known sooner rather than later! He ought perhaps to have told young Hicks to keep his mouth shut; but such warnings usually only made people talk more, in his experience.

'He was a great friend of yours, wasn't he?' the girl said to Julia, all sympathy. (This certainly *was* Hicks.)

Julia put down her glass and looked up at the nice young woman with her great dove's eyes.

'I've loved him ever since I was seven years old,' she said. 'Do you mind if we don't talk about it?'

It couldn't have been better done, Jamieson acknowledged—the nice young woman beat a hasty retreat, murmuring more sympathy. But a man in grey flannel trousers and a tweed jacket, who next accosted them, was less courteous.

'I believe you actually saw this fatal accident on Brayher yesterday,' he said, addressing himself to Jamieson. 'I represent

The Daily Error—I should be very glad to have your account of it.'

'I could never have seen any accident on *Brayher*, because there's no such place,' Philip replied curtly. 'Do you mean *Bryher*?'

'That's right. I can't get round all these names: *St. This* and *St. That*—funny, aren't they? Well now, Sir'—he drew out his reporter's pad, and looked expectantly at Jamieson.

'I am sorry, but I can tell you nothing. The police are handling the matter.'

'Now look, Sir,' the press-man said, thrusting his face unpleasantly close to Jamieson's, and speaking rather low. 'For a personal story, an eye-witness account, with anything you can tell of this old gentleman's background, what about two hundred and fifty pounds? Fair enough, eh?'

Julia rose to her feet; she overtopped the journalist by several inches, and in her indignation she forgot her good resolution about leaving Philip to handle things himself.

'No, not fair at all. Would you mind leaving us?'

The man from the *Daily Error* didn't take her point in the least. He merely raised his ante. 'Well, say three hundred and fifty, Miss,' he said.

'Oh, go to hell!' the girl exclaimed, and walked out of the bar.

Outside—'Darling, that was unwise,' Philip said. 'Never make a scene.'

Julia was crying.

'I know—I was a fool. I did just manage not to slap his face, though! But how can they be so *beastly*?'

'Their lords and masters, the Press Barons, pay them to be what they are—just that.' Up in the hotel garden he held her close, wiped her tear-stained face with his handkerchief, and kissed her. 'Sleep well,' he said. 'Concentrate on helping the old lady.'

Next morning Philip ordered a taxi to take them to the hospital. He waited in the corridor while a nurse took the old and the young woman in to bestow their flowers and say their prayers; then he saw them safely back into the hotel, and went down to the inquest.

This was a brief and businesslike affair. One or two features of it surprised Philip. He had expected that the Coroner would wish to go to the mortuary for the body to be identified, but no. P.C.

Trelawny stated on oath that Colonel Jamieson had identified the deceased, in his presence, as Professor Alfred Burbage, and recounted the rest of his story: the telephone call from Bryher, his trip to Shipman Head with the police surgeon, and finding the body. He tried to embark on the business of the ladder, but the Coroner cut him short, and called on Doctor Richards for an account of his post-mortem.

'The deceased fractured his skull by falling onto a bare rock; in my opinion this was the cause of death,' Doctor Richards said, 'in view of the fact that this fall took place an appreciable time before the two bullets, which I found in the body, were fired at it.'

'Was there any *medical* evidence that the bullet-wounds were inflicted after death?' the Coroner asked.

'No—the interval was too short, according to the account of the person who witnessed both the fall, and the firing of the revolver. But if the Professor fell some ninety seconds before he was shot, he was already dead.'

'Thank you.' The doctor stood down and the landlady of 'Suntrap' was called—her name, naturally, was also Hicks. Yes, the dead gentleman had been staying in her house for nearly a month; he went out almost every day to his 'explorations', as Mrs. Hicks called them. Had he seemed cheerful, or depressed?—the Coroner asked.

'Oh, he was just quiet, and so pleasant always,' Mrs. Hicks replied, tears coming into her eyes. The Coroner put his next question to her very gently.

'Now Mrs. Hicks, you are the last person who spoke to him alive. Can you tell us exactly what happened that morning?'

'Yes, Sir. He didn't order a picnic lunch, as he often did; he said he had some letters to write, and he sat in my front room, writing—he was sitting at the table in the window when I went in to clear away his breakfast, and he said—'A very nice breakfast, Mrs. Hicks.' She began to cry.

'And then?' the Coroner asked, still gently.

'When I'd washed up I went to his bedroom to make his bed, and straighten up. I saw young Hicks's boat come in, and a strange lady and gentleman walking up through The Town, but I didn't pay any attention—and then the first thing I knew, I heard the front door slam, and out he ran, no hat or anything, along the track.'

'He didn't speak to you before he went out?'

'No, Sir. He never went out before without saying goodbye, so friendly, nor without that funny hat of his.' Now Mrs. Hicks began to sob audibly. The Coroner made some notes; really to give her time. Presently—'What became of the letter he was writing?' he asked.

'I brought it, Sir, and the envelope—I thought it might be important.' She delved into her bag and produced a rather crumpled envelope and the two sheets of paper; the envelope was addressed to Mrs. Hathaway, and the letter began—'My dear Mary'; it was unfinished. The Coroner read it in silence, and put it in his brief-case.

'Thank you, Mrs. Hicks. That is very useful. I don't think we need keep you any longer—I expect you would like to do a little shopping. The boat will be ready to take you home presently.' The Coroner knew the habits of his Islanders pretty well—a chance at the shops in St. Mary's was always welcome. Wiping her eyes, Mrs. Hicks went out; Mr. Robinson next called Colonel Jamieson.

After Philip had given his name, address and occupation the Coroner asked him how long he had known the deceased?

'Personally, for some two months; by reputation, of course, all my life, as an archaeologist.'

'When did you first meet him?'

'This summer, in the Hebrides. I was introduced to him by my fiancée, who has known him since her childhood.'

'And can you say on oath that the body now in the mortuary is that of Professor Alfred Burbage?'

'Certainly.'

Philip then repeated the account of the accident which he had already given to the police and the doctor.

'Did you see him leave this house, "Suntrap"?' the Coroner asked.

'Yes. He seemed in a hurry,' Jamieson said cagily.

The Coroner looked rather keenly at this witness; he opened his mouth as if to speak—then he closed it again, and made a note.

'And what did you do?'

'We followed him. My fiancée wished to see him; that was why we had gone to Bryher, when we learned that he was staying there.'

'Ah.' The Coroner again made a note—Jamieson got the impression that he used these notes to cover pauses for reflection. 'That was how you came to be on Bad Place Hill in time to see him fall?'

'Precisely.'

'Thank you. You can stand down.'

Young Hicks was then called. He described taking the lady and gentleman to The Town, and how later he had taken the gentleman round to Shipman Head; the discovery of the ladder in the gulley, the arrival of the police and the doctor. The Coroner shuffled his notes together.

'Very well. I adjourn for one week. Thank you.' He got up.

Philip Jamieson rose too, and spoke to him as he was leaving the room.

'Can Professor Burbage be buried, in view of the adjournment?'

'Oh yes, of course—so long as you don't cremate him! And you'd have to take him to the mainland for that,' Mr. Robinson said cheerfully. 'I'll let the hospital know. Bolitho!' he called.

'Yes, Sir?'

'Tell the Matron at the hospital that I've given permission for this corpse to be buried.'

'Right, Sir.'

'Who's the parson?' Jamieson asked, as they went out.

'Oh, the Chaplain to the Isles.' He took out a card and scribbled a name and address on it. 'He will arrange everything. He's very nice.'

'Thank you, Sir. In the cemetery at Old Town?'

'Yes—that's our only burial-ground. You might just catch him now,' he added, glancing at his watch.

'Thank you, Sir.' But Philip did not leave him.

'May I ask you one highly unprofessional question? Shut me up if you want to.'

'Yes?'

'Was the letter Mrs. Hicks brought you addressed to a Mrs. Hathaway?'

'Yes—though I've no business to tell you so. I suppose that's the old lady who's at your hotel?'

'Yes. When you have done with it I expect she would like to have it.'

'She shall, after the adjournment. To tell you the truth I didn't

read it very carefully, but I don't think there was much in it.'

'That's very good of you. Goodbye.'

Philip debated whether to go and see the parson—what a charming title, 'Chaplain to the Isles'!—there and then; but the Zennor Hotel was rather rigid about punctuality at meals, and he decided to leave it till after lunch. On his way back he stepped through the stone gateway, where Julia had spotted the Professor coming in only a few days before, to take a look at the harbour, which he always found so attractive—fishing-boats tied up close under the houses at the inner end, and the long grey quay with the small motor-launches which kept the islands in communication with one another. He recognised young Hicks's boat just setting off for Bryher with the landlady from 'Suntrap'. But there was a new-comer lying in the small anchorage; a naval patrol-boat, from which a cutter was just being launched. Oh, better eat! He hurried back to the hotel.

He was just in time for lunch, and told Mrs. Hathaway that the burial could take place as soon as they could arrange it with the parson.

'Oh, what a comfort!' the old lady said. 'Thank you, Philip.'

'I think you'll like the graveyard,' he said. 'Of course they've had to open a new extension, but it's a rather sweet place, full of such touching memorials—there is one stone to an unidentified seaman who was washed up, with just the date of burial and the words—"Known to God".'

'How lovely!' Julia said; Mrs. Hathaway, like Mrs. Hicks at the inquest, wiped her eyes.

Halfway through the meal, not in the least to Philip's surprise, one of the receptionists came into the dining-room to say that someone wanted to see him at once.

'Is it a sailor?' Jamieson asked.

'Yes, Sir.'

'Well take him into the bar and give him a beer, and say that Colonel Jamieson will be with him in five minutes. Waiter!' Philip said. 'Let me have some cheese and biscuits at once, without waiting for the ladies, and coffee too—I've got to go out.'

Julia was looking out of the window. The Zennor Hotel stands high enough to command a view of a good part of the outer harbour, and she could see the naval patrol-boat lying there, flying the White Ensign—she guessed why 'a sailor' should want

to see Philip, but said nothing. Jamieson hurriedly swallowed down the rest of his first course; he took the Coroner's card out of his wallet, and handed it across the table to her.

'That's the Padre's name and address,' he said. 'You'd better get hold of him this afternoon yourself; I may be out for some time.'

'My poor Philip, why have you got to go out again?' Mrs. Hathaway asked.

'Oh, business,' the Colonel said cheerfully, pouring out his coffee. He too looked out of the window, but at the sky, which was overcast—and then at his watch. Not too much daylight left; he hoped the Captain, or whatever his rank was, had had the wits to lay on the local pilot, if there was one—if not, someone from the Boatmen's Association. He gulped down his coffee, lit a cigarette, and went out into the hall; the naval rating was waiting there for him.

'Colonel Jamieson?'

'Yes.'

'The Lieutenant-Commander would be much obliged if you could come on board at once, Sir.'

'Certainly. Sorry to keep you. I hope they gave you a drink?'

'Yes, thank you very much, Sir.'

The patrol-boat was not very big, and Philip could not be sure if the deck onto which he stepped amounted to a quarter-deck; but as she was flying the White Ensign he gave the prescribed salute. This pleased the Lieutenant-Commander, who promptly took him below to his cabin, where a large-scale chart was spread out on the desk.

'Now, you can tell me, I gather, just where to go.'

'Yes—but have you got a pilot? I know the spot, but I know nothing about the way there.'

'The pilot's got 'flu, but we've routed out a fellow who's supposed to know these waters.'

'If he's from the Boatmen's Association you're quite all right.'

The Lieutenant-Commander boomed in a main-top voice for a subordinate, who appeared instantly.

'Find out if this acting pilot is from the Boatmen's Association.'

'He is, Sir,' said the sub-lieutenant—'I've been talking to him.'

'All right.' He turned to the chart. 'Now, where are the doings?'

Jamieson bent over the desk. As on many charts of islands, much of the land was shown—he pointed with the butt end of his pen to the slabs below Shipman Head. ‘You land there—ten fathoms, as you see. Plenty for you, isn’t it?’

‘Yes. But where’s the installation?’

‘Across that gap, out on the far side.’

‘Why not go round and land from that side, and save humping the stuff across? We’ve got to take it back with us, you know.’

‘No landing-place, and probably a ten-foot swell.’ He glanced at the barometer clipped to the wall on a bracket. ‘The glass is going down, too,’ he said. ‘But why not have a word with the deputy pilot? I’m not a sailor.’

‘My orders are to let the locals in on this as little as possible. But let’s go up—you can talk to him.’

On deck an islander in a peaked cap, looking rather self-satisfied, was standing among a group of naval ratings.

‘This gentleman wants to ask you something,’ the Lieutenant-Commander said.

‘What’s that?’ the boatman enquired.

‘Would you say it was possible to land a boat anywhere on the outer side of Shipman Head?’ Jamieson asked. The local seaman looked at him pitifully.

‘Oh no—that’s quite out of the question. The only place to land on Shipman Head is on those slabs, beyond the Neck from Bad Place Hill. That’s sheltered water—any boat would be dashed to bits on the other side.’

‘Thank you,’ Jamieson said quietly; he refrained from looking at the Lieutenant-Commander. ‘This gentleman now gave orders to proceed to sea.’

‘Mr.—er—Simpson, will you go up onto the bridge with the Navigating Officer, and act as pilot? We will go to these slabs you speak of.’ He gave a sub-lieutenant the chart.

‘Well, you were quite right,’ the officer said. He glanced at Jamieson’s burberry. ‘Won’t you be cold in that thing?’ he asked, as the little vessel shot out of the harbour.

‘Yes. I’m cold now.’

‘Perkins, find a duffle-coat for this gentleman.’

Snug in the duffle-coat, Jamieson stood watching their progress; the patrol-boat was very much faster than the small local launches, and in no time they were in the narrow Grimsby

Channel, between Tresco and Bryher. 'What are those two castles?' the Lieutenant-Commander asked.

'The upper one is Charles's Castle; that lower one they call Cromwell's Castle—Admiral Blake built it.'

'Did he now? And what's that island to port?'

'Hangman's Island—the hill behind it is called Bad Place Hill.'

'Cheerful sort of spot!' the officer was saying, when he heard the engines slacken to half-speed, and then the anchor being let to. 'Hullo, are we there?'

'Yes. We land on those slabs just to the left of that gap in the rocks. By the way, your men will want some rope slings, or something of the sort, to carry the stuff in—some of it is pretty heavy.'

'Oh, we've got all that, and tarpaulins to wrap it up.'

'And picks? It's buried, you see.'

'Yes. I've detailed twelve men, and we've brought an electrician along, to disconnect everything.'

Those last words rang a sort of bell in Jamieson's mind. 'Disconnect'—yes indeed; it would be just like the Russians suddenly to plant a booby-trap of some sort, to blow up anyone who interfered with their machinery. But he left that for the moment. While two boats were lowered the Lieutenant-Commander checked his gear as it was put on board—then he spoke to Simpson.

'Mr. Simpson, some of us are going ashore for a while. Perkins here will see that you get some refreshment.'

'I wouldn't be too long, Sir, if I were you. It looks like blowing up a bit.'

'No, we shan't be very long.'

Once the landing-party was ashore the Lieutenant-Commander spoke to a sub-lieutenant in one of the boats.

'When you go back to the ship keep a look-out. If we're delayed we may want the search-lights put on to help us down. I'll give a torch-signal.'

'Aye aye, Sir.'

'Now, Colonel, you're in charge. Lead on,' he said to Jamieson.

Philip was extremely glad of the flashes which he had made on the rocks as the party stumbled and scrambled up to the gap. As before, when they reached it wind and spume hit them in the face; but this time he was able to make his way unhesitatingly to

the installation. Some yards short of it he paused—that bell was still ringing in his mind.

‘I’d like you all to wait here for a moment,’ he said to the officer. ‘I want to have a last look round before you get going.’

‘Why?’ the Lieutenant-Commander asked impatiently. ‘We’ve not got any too much daylight left.’

‘In case there’s a booby-trap. I didn’t check for one before.’

‘Then you’d better take the bossin—he’s up in these things. Hillman!’

At the summons a small man in civilian dress, wearing thick-lensed spectacles and carrying a leather case of tools stepped forward; he was the bossin of fiction to the life, Jamieson thought, with rather wry amusement.

‘Just go with Colonel Jamieson and give this outfit the once-over,’ the officer said.

‘Very well, Sir.’

Jamieson led the little man forward and showed him the socket of the aerial, the plastic saucer over the main installation, and where the long-life batteries were situated, a few feet away.

‘Ah. Well if there’s any funny-business, it’s probably here,’ Hillman said, kneeling down beside the plastic cover. ‘P’raps you’d better stand back, Sir.’

Jamieson didn’t stand back—intensely apprehensive, he nevertheless stood and watched while the little bossin opened a pocket-knife and proceeded to slide the blade round the edge of the plastic cover; presently it encountered an obstruction—Hillman pressed his knife-blade outwards and then hard back towards himself.

‘Here we are,’ he said; ‘but I think I’ve got the plunger held. If not, Goodbye to all that! Now, Sir, could you ease that plastic thing up, so that we can see?’

Thinking that this might indeed be Goodbye to so much—Julia, his life with her in Gray’s Inn, his work—Philip very gently slid his fingers under the edge of the plastic saucer, and raised it.

‘Got ’im! Fine,’ the little man said, peering into the space beneath. ‘Could you feel in my right pocket and get out a roll of plaster? There’s a pair of scissors too—cut me off a short length. This is the tricky part.’

Jamieson did as he was told, and handed the gummy strip to the small expert, who most carefully and delicately fastened it

over a minute electric switch, attached to the side of the metal case containing the satellite-tracker. This done, the boffin himself cut off a second strip of plaster, and gummed it over the first one.

'Now we're sound,' he said. 'Nothing to do but disconnect the wiring.' He took out a powerful torch, and peered into the metal box. 'Ah! here we are,' he repeated. He took a pair of pliers from his tool-case, cut two wires descending from the tiny switch, and with another sort of tape insulated both ends.

'Okay. Now their damned dynamite is as dead as mutton,' Hillman said, raising himself.

'How are you getting on?' the Lieutenant-Commander called, seeing the movement.

'Nearly ready,' Hillman called back. He bent down again, and flashed his torch round the interior of the metal box; Jamieson, now rather less frightened, peered in too. The metal saucer with its many spikes, below the cone, left small spaces at the corners of the rectangular container; in one of these lay what looked like a small tin box, barely four inches square.

'There's the charge,' Hillman exclaimed. 'Might as well have it out. Could you steady my legs? This perishing thing is rather deep.'

Jamieson held the little boffin by the legs while he bent down.

'Give me a pull,' Hillman said after a moment. Jamieson hauled him out; in one hand he held the small box, with the two lengths of flex dangling from it. He carried it carefully across the rocky slope and set it on the ground some thirty yards away.

'Okay now—come on and get going,' Jamieson called to the Lieutenant-Commander.

The sailors came up and started prizing out the hay and cotton-waste in which the installation was embedded; two others stuffed this into sacks, while Hillman looked on.

'Heave her out, now,' he said at length.

The metal case with its contents was extremely heavy; in spite of the handgrips round the upper edges, it was all four men could do to raise it up out of the rocky hole. As they started wrapping it in a tarpaulin—'Keep it right-side up,' the boffin exclaimed sharply. 'Here'—he took out a red pencil and wrote 'TOP' on the upper side of the tarpaulin bundle.

The Lieutenant-Commander started to stroll across towards the small tin box.

'You leave that alone,' Hillman called sharply. 'That's dynamite.'

'Yes, but we can't leave dynamite lying about,' the officer said. He turned to Jamieson. 'Do cattle or sheep come here?'

'I shouldn't think so.'

'Or tourists?'

'One never knows *where* tourists will go,' Jamieson replied indifferently.

'Better put it in the sea, then.' The Lieutenant-Commander walked over, picked up the box of dynamite, strolled a few yards further down the slope, and lobbed the object into the surf.

'Lie down!' Hillman yelled. But the officer had been a fast bowler in his day, and placed this particular ball well—a shattering roar rose from the green waters as spray was flung high into the air; but the explosion was too far off to do any harm. The Lieutenant-Commander went back and spoke to Jamieson.

'Did you find this on the rest of the sites?' he asked.

'No. I must make a signal as soon as possible to warn the other parties—this is a new idea. But we can't count on their not having planted them in other places. Everywhere else I lifted the plastic covers, and nothing happened.'

'We'll do that as soon as we get back. Now, what more have we got to collect?'

Raising the leaden long-life batteries was much less trouble, heavy as they were—over that rough going it needed two men to carry them. Jamieson had been worrying about how to excavate the aerial from that rocky soil, but it proved to be a telescopic affair, six four-foot sections sliding into one another, sunk between two slabs—with its metal socket it was easily pulled out from its bed of cotton-waste, disconnected from its wiring to the main box, and also wrapped in a tarpaulin and placed in a rope sling. But all this took time, and the light was fading fast as the naval party, burdened with their heavy loads, began to struggle up over the rocky ground to the gap—in fact by then it was getting too dark to see one's way. The Lieutenant-Commander, the moment he saw the lights of his ship below him, flashed his torch; at once her searchlight spread a glorious flood of light over the wild slope.

'Good-oh! That's the job,' one of the sailors exclaimed. Encouraged, they carried their burdens down to the slabs, and with

some trouble got them aboard the boats which had come to meet them. Jamieson insisted on staying to supervise this process, and the Lieutenant-Commander waited with him; both boats had to make a second trip, and they went on board in the last one.

'Get all that stuff lashed aft,' the officer said to the sub-lieutenant, 'and put an extra cover over the lot—we may get a bit of a blow round Land's End.'

'Aye aye, Sir.'

'Now, Mr. Simpson, you see us back to St. Mary's, will you?' He turned to Jamieson. 'Come below and have a tot. I'm perished; I don't know about you. God, you were right about that outer shore—what a hellish place!'

'Just round the headland from where we were it's called Hell Bay,' Jamieson said.

'How right!'

Simpson had been right about the weather blowing up too; crossing 'The Road', the broad channel between Samson and St. Mary's, which is completely open to the west, the small vessel was buffeted by heavy seas coming in from the Atlantic. The Lieutenant-Commander, when he felt this violent motion, left his guest to go up onto the bridge; he returned to his whisky with a satisfied expression.

'All serene, though it's almost a Force 8 gale already. That local chap certainly knows his stuff,' he said. 'Look—would you like me to send a radio signal for you? We could, of course.'

'Thank you very much, Sir, but I think it may save time in the end if I ring the office as soon as we get in—transferring messages from one branch to another sometimes leads to hold-ups, and I know exactly whom to contact.'

'But our people will be handling these other sites, won't they?'

'Except the Irish ones. But my office will be in touch with your people, and will ring them at once—and Dublin too.'

'Have it your own way,' the Lieutenant-Commander said. 'I haven't really much of a clue as to what all this is in aid of—I was just told to come and contact you, and remove an installation, and take it to Portsmouth.'

'Well you've done the removing part,' Jamieson said, as the boat rounded the end of the long quay into the blessed shelter of St. Mary's harbour, and the lights of Hugh Town shone in through the portholes of the cabin.

He and Simpson were put ashore; Jamieson hurried to the Post Office, which was still open, and put through a personal call to Captain Brown at his office number.

'Brown?—Jimmy here.'

'Has the R.N. done it's stuff?' Brown asked cheerfully.

'Yes. But we found something rather nasty, and quite new—a booby-trap. You'd better get a signal off to the other parties, urgently—and to Dublin as well, of course.'

'By booby-trap d'you mean what I think you mean?'

'Yes. Have they all got boffins along? If not, tell them to hold everything till they're sent up.'

'Right—I'll see to that. You didn't find this set-up before?'

'No—or I shouldn't be here! It must be a new bright idea. But it may have been installed on the earlier places since.'

'Quite. Now, can you come up at once? We shall want a detailed report on this; and besides, those foreign worthies are being landed this evening, and we expect them up here early tomorrow. Can you catch a boat or a plane tonight?'

'I shouldn't think so. The steamer sailed this afternoon, and the plane won't be flying—we've got a Force 8 gale on.'

'What a place! When does the steamer sail next?'

'Day after tomorrow—if she can get back!'

'What a place!' Captain Brown repeated.

'Look, I'm going to ring off now,' Jamieson said. 'There's just a chance that I might catch my little boat, and get her to take me.' Without waiting for a reply he put down the receiver, raced through the small streets, and down onto the quay. The lights of the patrol-boat were still shining across the dark, gently-heaving waters of the harbour, but how was he to get hold of her? He had no torch to signal with. He ran on down the quay, and to his infinite relief saw the unmistakable caps of two naval ratings—he hailed them.

'Have you got a boat here?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'Well wait—I'm coming with you.' He took out a fountain-pen and scribbled on a card—'Please wait half an hour for me; I'm wanted in London at once. P. Jamieson.'

'Take that aboard—tell the Lieutenant-Commander I'll be down as soon as I can, probably in less than half an hour; but he mustn't go without me.'

'Aye aye, Sir' the ratings responded.

Jamieson hurried up to the hotel—Julia was not in the hall, and he went to her room.

'Come in,' she called.

'Come to my room—we'll talk while I pack. I've got to go up to London.'

'But the funeral's arranged for the day after tomorrow,' Julia said, while in his room Philip began selecting and hurling objects into the smaller of his two suitcases.

'I'm terribly sorry, darling, but I've got to go. Try to get the Padre to put it off for another twenty-four hours—I might get back by then. I do want to be there—you know that.'

'Yes, but why the tearing hurry? And how can you go?—they say the plane's grounded.'

'On the patrol-boat—they're holding her for me.'

'Oh.' Julia sat down on the bed. 'Well, it's rather tiresome,' she said.

'Yes. You'll have a very tiresome life, once you're really married into the Service,' he said, snapping his suit-case to. He gave her a long kiss. 'I'm desperately sorry—tell Mrs. H. so, with my love. If I possibly can I'll get back for the funeral. Give me a ring at Gray's Inn—oh, and you might ring Buchan and tell him I'll probably be wanting breakfast there tomorrow morning.'

'Gracious! Shall you drive up? Oh, bless you!' the girl said. Philip grabbed up his suit-case, his type-writer, and brief-case, and ran downstairs and out to the quay.

Chapter 16

THE small patrol-boat took a thorough pasting rounding Land's End. Jamieson had asked the Lieutenant-Commander to put him ashore at Penzance; but with the savage weather it was after 10 p.m. when he was landed, on a dripping quay, in that harbour with the inconveniently narrow entrance. His naval host had given him supper, but as he carried his effects through the rainy streets he wished fervently that he had thought to tell Julia to ring up the garage where he had left the car—what on earth was he to do if it was shut? He wasn't sure of the way, and on that wet night there was no one about to ask; but when at last he found the place the lights were on. Thank Goodness!

As he walked in a man came out from the little cubby-hole of an office where he had been cowering over a small electric fire.

'Colonel Jamieson? Ah, the lady rang through from St. Mary's to say you'd be wanting the car tonight. She's all ready—petrol, oil, air, batteries'—he went over and patted the Bentley admiringly. 'Lovely car.'

Lovely girl, Jamieson was thinking, to have organised this without being told. He paid the man, tipping him handsomely, threw his small pieces of luggage into the back, and drove off into the night.

Penzance is over two hundred and eighty miles from London, but Bentleys are fast cars, and lorries apart English roads are not crowded after midnight, especially in winter and late autumn. He stopped twice for a cup of synthetic coffee at roadside lorry-halts, to keep himself awake, but all the same he was pushing the groundfloor bell of his rooms in Gray's Inn at a quarter to six, having parked his car under the high wall. Buchan's head promptly appeared at a window.

'That you, Sir? Right—I'll be down.' And before Philip was half-way upstairs his manservant appeared, fully dressed, and took his luggage from him. 'Miss Probyn rang up and said you'd be here for breakfast; but I worked out the mileage and I guessed you'd be early, so I didn't undress.'

Blessing his ex-batman almost as much as his future wife, Philip hastily took a bath, drank his coffee in bed, and said that he was to be called at 8.30, with breakfast at nine. Then he had two hours good sleep. By ten he was in Captain Brown's office.

'Good work, getting off on that patrol-boat,' that worthy said. 'Did you make the night train?'

'No. I drove up.'

'Good God! Well, here's the form. The party that's handling the Erinish Islands have got an electric expert along.'

'Good. Are they doing the Callernish site too?'

'I think so.' He opened a folder and looked at some papers. 'Yes. And we've flown a boffin to Dublin—the Irish aren't quite so up in these things yet as Farnborough or Harwell, naturally.'

Philip was glad of this. He would have hated to think of old Charlie Ruddy being blown to glory up on The Bank, when he led the Irish party to the spot. He took out his report, hurriedly typed on the lurching patrol-boat on his way to Penzance. 'Sorry it's a bit untidy.'

Brown studied it carefully.

'That tiny plunger thing under the plastic lid is curious,' he said. He pressed a bell on his desk, and made some pencil lines down the margin of Philip's report. When a small middle-aged man came in—'Have these marked passages encoded, and radioed immediately to J. M. L., now in the Hebrides. Telephone them in cypher to Dublin—Mr. Richardson will give you the number. It's urgent. Then bring me the papers back.'

'Very good, Sir.'

Brown sat back in his chair and looked across at Jamieson.

'What on earth made you suspect a booby-trap in the Scillies, when, as I gather, you'd lifted all these other plastic lids, and nothing happened?'

'It was rather odd,' Philip said slowly. He told Brown how the two words 'disconnect everything' had suddenly rung a bell in his head, and his subsequent precautions.

'Second sight, I suppose,' Brown said.

'No, I've no Highland blood. A hunch, they would call it today—the Bible phrase for hunches was, apparently, "being warned of God in a dream".'

'But you weren't in a dream.'

'No. But I think the rest of the sentence applies.'

'Well it was damned lucky, anyhow,' Captain Brown said, brushing God aside with the slight embarrassment which is common form in the twentieth century; he passed on to the next item on his programme.

'We've got the crew of that Russian trawler up here—they're in a police-station. Would you like to come and see them now, or leave it till tomorrow?'

'I'd much sooner do it at once—I want to get back.'

'All right—we've got an interpreter. You may be able to identify the man with the revolver.'

In the clean, rather drab surroundings of the police-station the crew of the Russian trawler were brought in by two police-constables, and marshalled in a row—Jamieson scanned their faces.

'He's not here,' he said to Brown. He turned to the interpreter. 'Ask them what they did to the man who fired the revolver,' he said abruptly. As the interpreter put the question disturbed expressions appeared on one or two of the flat, snub-nosed Russian faces; then the leader spoke.

'He says he was drowned,' the interpreter said.

'There you are—I felt pretty sure they would do him in,' Jamieson said to Captain Brown.

'Well, we'll hold them all as accessories to attempted murder,' Brown said. 'Tell them that,' he ordered the interpreter. But this time the faces remained impassive. They were marched out again, and the three officials returned to the office.

'Well, I'll report to the Home Office that you can't recognise the actual murderer,' Brown said. 'Then they can cope with the Coroner in the Scillies about his adjourned inquest. Murky-looking set, weren't they? Now, what are your movements?'

'Get some sleep, and drive down to Penzance tonight to catch the Scilly boat, if she's able to sail tomorrow.'

'What on earth for?'

'Professor Burbage's funeral. If the boat's going, or the plane's flying again, I may be in time.'

'Oh—ah—yes. I'd like to hear in more detail about that. D'you think he bumped himself?'

'It's impossible to be sure. He was certainly running away from us—me, probably.' He described the pursuit on Bryher, and its miserable ending. 'I should rather like to know how all that

stands, now, from your latest information,' Jamieson said. .

'Well he'd certainly been being blackmailed for a long time, and he was undoubtedly in touch with them; but from what we've been able to piece together, I think he was smart enough never to do them any real good.'

'I shouldn't ever have thought of him as smart,' Jamieson replied. 'But if you could tell me that he was really clear of any *de facto* treachery, it would be a comfort.'

'Who to? You?'

'Indirectly. Directly, to my fiancée, and still more to her old godmother, who's been a friend of his for fifty years.'

'Well I think you can say that, to them.'

'Thank you.'

Philip Jamieson did get back in time for the Professor's funeral. He felt rather disinclined for another long drive, and Julia, anyhow, would have to escort Mrs. Hathaway back to London. Finding that there was a night train from Paddington that connected with the boat he decided to take it, sent Buchan to book a sleeper, and rang Julia up to that effect.

'The boat will be too late—take the plane,' the girl said.

'How's your gale?'

'Oh, blown itself out—all calm now.'

'Good.'

'Are you frightfully tired?' she asked.

'Oh, nothing to mention.' But he liked the question; since his mother died no one had ever cared to know whether he was tired or not—it was nice to think that now there would be someone who did. After a long sleep he ate Buchan's excellent dinner, took a taxi to Paddington, and slept again, soundly, in the train; from Penzance he took another taxi out to the small airport, and caught an early plane to St. Mary's.

The churchyard at Old Town is some distance from Hugh Town, close to the sea. They had expected to be the only mourners, a pitiful little company of three—but no. As they walked after the white-robed Chaplain to the open grave they were joined by another small party—Mrs. Hicks of 'Suntrap', with her husband; young Hicks, the Bryher boatman, and his father, and the post mistress from Bryher—all had brought flowers. Once again Jamieson thought what nice people the Islanders were. The calm and reassuring words of the burial service were read over the

poor old Professor in that quiet spot—'Oh Death, where is thy sting? Oh grave, where is thy victory?'—Jamieson threw a handful of soil onto the coffin, in the prescribed manner. Later, unobtrusively, he fed the Chaplain, and gave him money for the sexton and his assistants; he also introduced the Bryher party to Mrs. Hathaway and Julia, and invited them back to eat something at the Zennor Hotel. But before leaving he took Julia and Mrs. Hathaway, at Julia's request, to see the stone to the unknown seaman with the words 'Known to God'. As they walked back past the little chapel Jamieson saw a group of men carrying a stretcher covered with blankets into it. Once again a bell rang in his head.

'Take Mrs. H. to the car; I want to check on something. Wait, if she's not too tired; I shan't be a moment.'

While Julia obediently took Mrs. Hathaway to the taxi, Philip went over to the chapel—the men who had carried the stretcher in were just coming out.

'Who have you been putting in there?' Jamieson asked.

'A man washed ashore this morning.'

'Could I have a look?'

'Think you could identify him?' the man in charge of the stretcher-party asked. 'We like to identify our bodies, but we very seldom can.' As he spoke he opened the door into the small, cold, bare chapel, where the stretcher, muffled in blankets, lay on the stone floor.

'Oh, I don't suppose so. Just interested—I've never seen a person washed up by the sea before.'

'This one's pretty fresh,' another of the men said, with a macabre grin—'not been in long enough for the dog-fish or the crabs to get at him!'

'Shut up, Legg,' the older man said, as he drew down the blanket. The pallid greenish face Jamieson recognised at once; it was that of the little man who had run across the Neck on Bryher and shot at the Professor. He drew the blanket further down, and examined the clothing: yes, two holes in the oilskin jacket, over the heart—just what he had expected.

'Know who he is?' the leader of the party asked.

'No.' Jamieson drew the blanket up again, covering the poor face. 'But thank you very much,' he said. The stretcher-party didn't seem to have noticed the holes.

In the taxi on the way back to Hugh Town Philip took the opportunity to tell Mrs. Hathaway and Julia what Brown had told him—that, officially, the Professor was cleared of any substantial treachery; going out to the graveyard he had felt too hurried and concerned with practical details to do this. Mrs. Hathaway, who had held up nobly during the funeral, burst into tears.

‘Oh Philip, why didn’t you tell me before? I could have prayed quite differently,’ the old lady said.

‘You can pray differently now,’ he answered. ‘I am *very* sorry, Mrs. H.’

‘You might have telephoned about this,’ Julia said, rather sternly. ‘No I see you couldn’t do that,’ she added, after a moment. ‘Mrs. H., darling, he’s quite right. After all, one doesn’t only pray for the dead at the graveside.’

‘No. I shall pray for him for the rest of my life,’ the old lady said, with sudden firmness. She wiped her eyes. ‘Thank you, dear Philip; it was good of you to tell me. It is such a relief, after all these years.’

Back at the hotel Julia and Philip suggested that Mrs. Hathaway should have lunch sent up to her room; she would not hear of it.

‘No, I want to be with these nice people while they eat the funeral baked meats’ she said stoutly. So they all partook of an early luncheon with the party from Bryher, preceded and accompanied by liberal drinks; Mrs. Hathaway expended herself on getting onto terms with the Islanders—telling them about the Professor’s great achievements, and hearing their accounts of him.

‘That’s a marvellous old lady,’ young Hicks said to Philip, as he saw them out through the garden. ‘Goodbye. Shall we be seeing you again?’

‘Not just now—we’re going back to London. Next spring, perhaps.’

‘Oh, good. Let us know when you come back.’

After seeing Julia, and learning that Mrs. Hathaway was safely on her bed, Philip first telephoned to book sleepers back to London the following night, and then rang up the Coroner.

‘Could I see you? I’m off tomorrow.’

‘Yes, by all means. Come along at once.’

In Mr. Robinson's pleasant room Philip gladly accepted a cup of coffee and a cigarette.

'Well, London tell me you couldn't identify the would-be murderer when that trawler's crew were paraded in front of you yesterday,' the Coroner said.

'No. But I did so this morning.'

'Where, and *how*, for goodness sake?'

'He's lying in the little chapel at Old Town—I saw a body being carried in after we had buried the Professor, so I went to have a look. He certainly fired the two revolver-shots, but his dear chums bumped him, as I expected,' Jamieson said. He described the holes in the jacket.

'What *creatures*!' Mr. Robinson said. 'A curious coincidence, your seeing him being carried in, though.'

'Shall you have to hold an inquest on him, too? Just a corpse washed up by the sea?'

'Oh indeed yes—we do on all of them, but usually they can't be identified.'

'Known to God,' Philip murmured.

'Oh, you know that stone? Nice, isn't it?'

'Very nice.' But Jamieson was rather put about at the idea of this second inquest. He explained to the Coroner that he had been hoping to get off the following day—'I imagined that you might not want me for the adjourned inquest on Professor Burbage.'

'This rather alters it. I'm afraid I shall need to have you present now, for both. You at least know that the corpse at Old Town was a Russian national. which no one else does.'

'Yes, I see.' Philip reflected. 'How soon must these inquests be? I did rather want to escort my party back to London tomorrow night. I suppose I couldn't take them up and come down again?'

'How long would that take?'

'Thirty-six hours.'

'Seems a lot of needless travelling,' the Coroner said. 'If I lay on both inquests for tomorrow'—he glanced at his desk calendar. 'Oh, tomorrow's Saturday. Never mind. If we got it all over tomorrow you could get off by the plane on Monday, or by the *Scillonian* on Tuesday. Mightn't that be a better plan? Are you needed in London over the week-end?'

'We are like women. "A woman's work is never done", so week-ends mean nothing to us,' Philip said. 'But I think perhaps this is a better plan. You're very kind.' He got up. 'May I ring you back when I've talked to my ladies?'

In fact the moment he talked to his younger lady he saw that the Coroner's plan was a good one. The Professor's death had been a severe shock to Mrs. Hathaway; immediately after hearing of it she had made the considerable effort of a hurried start, a night journey, and a roughish sea trip; up till the funeral, and during the little luncheon after it, she had borne herself splendidly. But she was an old woman, and once the need for effort was over she had a sort of collapse. Philip, who had admired her courage through all this, was not in the least surprised when Julia said to him—'You'll have to cancel those sleepers. Mrs. H. is a bit overdone; she ought to have two or three days in bed. When does the *Scillonian* go next?'

'Monday or Tuesday, I think.'

'Oh good—that will give us a week-end here. I think she will be all right, but she must keep quiet for a bit. Anyhow she'll be just as well looked after here as by those old creatures of hers in London.' Julia took a dim view of Mrs. Hathaway's two elderly and rather spoilt servants.

Philip telephoned to the Coroner at once.

'Thank you, Sir—if you can fix up the inquests for tomorrow it would be excellent. The old lady is rather done up—she won't be fit to travel tomorrow.'

'Right—I'll lay on both. 11.30 all right?'

'Whatever suits you,' Jamieson said.

He attended the two inquests the following morning; both were brief formal affairs. (The Press had lost interest in the case, and taken themselves off.) A verdict of 'accidental death' was returned on the Professor, and on the Russian sailor one of 'murder by a person or persons unknown'. (The Home Office had expressed a strong preference for this solution on the telephone.)

But Julia was right about Mrs. Hathaway being well looked after at St. Mary's. The maids in the Zennor Hotel rallied round the old lady, constantly offering her freshly-pressed orange-juice, or a re-filled hot-water bottle. It was of course the dead season, and no one in the hotel was particularly busy; but this kindly

attention was very nice, all the same. After twenty-four hours of it Julia felt that she could safely leave her precious godmother for part of the day, at least, and she made a suggestion to Philip at breakfast.

'*Couldn't* we go and see those gardens at Tresco?' I do want to. Last time you dragged me off to look at that beastly trawler instead.'

'Darling, I didn't know then that the trawler was *there*—I just wanted to see the lie of the land,' he protested.

'Yes—well now the trawler's sunk, and we know the lie of the land only too well!' the girl said sadly. 'Do let's have *one* peaceful day here, with no spying or searching.'

He looked at her distressfully. 'Darling, I didn't realise you disliked my job so much. Are you sure you want to marry me?'

'Oh don't be silly, Philip. The Prof's dead; he was the only part of your job I minded—I've rather enjoyed my own other little efforts in that line. Stop fussing, and get us to Tresco.'

They went. On the *Black Swan* to Old Grimsby, on foot across the island, and then followed the drive up to the Abbey, with the lake on their left, encircled by pale reeds and full of curious birds; Philip, to Julia's surprise, could name most of the exotic shrubs and conifers bordering the avenue.

'Gracious! How much you know!' she exclaimed.

'Fond of plants,' the man said deprecatingly. 'An uncle of mine had rather a good arboretum, so I was more or less brought up with that sort of thing.'

The gardens at Tresco are really a miracle, given their northern latitude. The lie of the land, skilful shelter-planting, and above all the blessed warmth of the Gulf Stream pouring past, month in and month out, have made it possible to create a semi-tropical Paradise only some fifty miles from the cold, frost-ridden, foggy mainland of Britain. Julia fairly gasped at what she saw as they walked along the paths, here and there passing the ruins of the ancient Abbey buildings: huge bushes of camellias about to burst into flower, banks bright with pelargoniums, and self-sown freesias growing practically wild in every odd corner, scenting the air deliciously.

'But this is like Tangier,' she exclaimed.

'What is?'

'Well especially the freesias. They used them as borders to the

paths at the Consulate-General. Oh Philip, what on earth is that?' She indicated a strange-looking plant.

He told her its name, and the names of many other unusual specimens—collected, experimentally planted, and tended unceasingly since 1834, when the original 'Lord Proprietor' of the Islands, Augustus Smith, settled down on the wind-swept, sandy, utterly bare Tresco (there was not so much as a gorse-bush then on the whole island) built himself a house, and started the gardens. Julia had heard of them, but knew little of their history; perched on a seat she listened while Philip recounted to her how the Scillonian seamen, trading in the Southern Hemisphere, had brought back roots and seeds to augment the collection; of the gifts from Kew Gardens and, later, of plant-collecting expeditions sent out by subsequent owners of Tresco.

'What a lovely thing to do,' she said at length. 'So much nicer and more worth while than endowing some revolting technical college to teach people how to make atom bombs.'

The man laughed.

'Come and see Valhalla—though I wish they didn't call it that.' He led her down to a large open-fronted shed, filled with what is probably a unique collection of the carved and painted figure-heads from the prows of ships wrecked off the Scillies: Grecian goddesses, ancient heroes—even one gentleman in full Highland dress; many had been carefully re-painted, and restored to their original brilliance of colour. Julia examined them, and turned to her companion in delight.

'There you are again,' she said. 'Something really worth doing—collecting them, and getting them all tidied up. What frightfully sensible people these Smith-Dorriens, or Dorrien-Smiths—which are they?—must be.'

'Dorrien-Smith,' he told her.

'Well they have all the right ideas. Making this divine garden, and rescuing these charming things from the wreckers. I bet you a lot of the Islanders would have chopped them up for firewood as soon as look at you. Remember that sawing-horse on Bryher?'

'Yes. But remember how nice the Bryher people were about old Burbage.'

'I do—I shall never forget that.' She gave a sort of sniffing sob. 'Oh, I am so thankful that the poor old sweet never did anything

really *wrong*. He was quite silly enough to, you see,' she said candidly.

'Yes. But I think the authorities, too, grasped that in the end; which was why they were able to clear him. I don't suppose anyone will ever get to the bottom of all that—I mean what he did or didn't do to help the wretched Russians. Personally, I don't mind—all I really care about is that he should have been cleared, to set your and Mrs. H.'s minds at rest.'

He said this as they happened to be passing a seat set against a wall under some strange tree with bright red flowers; the girl caught his elbow, drew him down onto the seat, threw her arms round him, and kissed him warmly.

'Oh you precious Philip! I do so love you for being so loving, and charitable.'

This little scene was prolonged for some time, greatly to the satisfaction of both parties—when they left the seat Julia pulled off one of the red flowers from the overhanging tree and tucked it away in her handbag—'Just to remind,' she said, smiling.

Philip Jamieson was happy too. Ever since he became engaged to Julia he had had some of the sensations of a man who has managed to snare a Bird of Paradise, but wonders if he will succeed in getting it safely home? After that talk in the gardens at Tresco he felt much more certain of settling his particular Bird of Paradise in his house in Gray's Inn.

They crossed the low ridge of the island; they were to lunch at the hotel before returning to St. Mary's. As they walked up the sandy drive Philip, remembering Julia's request for one day 'with no spying or searching', rather nervously put a question to her.

'Should you mind frightfully if I made an enquiry here? It has only this moment occurred to me that I ought to.'

'What on earth about?'

'That extraordinary little chef man.'

'But he's gone, hasn't he?'

'Yes. All the same I ought to ask, if you didn't mind.'

'Oh, ask away! All I want is a drink, and a good lunch.'

They ordered their drinks in the comfortable little bar; then Jamieson went up to the Manager, whom he already knew by sight, and asked if he could have a word with him?

'Most gladly. Here?'

'No, not here,' the Colonel said. 'By ourselves.'

The Manager went and looked into the Television room—it was empty. 'Come in here,' he said, 'where we can sit. I'm no good at standing.' Philip, who had been standing for the better part of two hours in the Tresco gardens, was himself quite glad to sit.

'Now, how can I help you?' the Manager asked. 'You're in Intelligence, aren't you? You went out on that Naval boat to Shipman Head, and found something funny, I gather.'

On this occasion Jamieson rather blessed the Islands' hyper-efficient grapevine—it made his own task easier.

'Yes. But some days before that—the last time we lunched here, in fact—we walked out to King Charles's Castle and saw a Russian trawler come in and anchor under Shipman Head; and presently we saw that odd little Middle-Eastern-looking chef of yours signalling to her.'

'What makes you think this man you saw was our chef?' the Manager asked, in a rather chilly tone.

'Oh, we picked that up on the *Scillonian*; he came over on her with us. And then we saw him coming up here, and going in by the staff entrance. But look,' Jamieson said, 'since you know that I'm in Intelligence, why do you want to hold out on me? Are you for, or against, my job?'

The Manager gave a rather rueful laugh.

'I'm sorry. I was a little taken aback by how much you knew; silly of me. Ask anything you like—I'll tell you all I can.'

'Thank you. Well, first, how did you recruit him?'

'By an advertisement in the *Daily Telegram*—our head chef fell ill just a few weeks before we were due to close. This man answered; a Swiss name, and when he turned up, a Swiss passport. I did my early training in Switzerland, like most of us—after all, they are the *world's* hoteliers—so I took him on, though when he arrived I didn't think he looked at all Swiss, I must admit.'

'References?'

'He sent those with his application; from perfectly reputable places in Lucerne and Lausanne—I didn't bother to take them up, as it was for such a short time.'

'No, I understand. *Could* he in fact cook?' Jamieson asked, with genuine curiosity.

'Yes—superbly. Much better than our poor old fellow who'll be coming back to us in the spring, though he's quite good. Why do you want to know that?' The Manager was curious in his turn.

'It's always interesting, and often useful, to know how thorough the—well, the opposition—are about the people they plant on us for these jobs,' the Colonel replied. 'This time they obviously were very thorough.'

The Manager stared at him.

'But do you mean that this man was sent here, deliberately, to signal to that trawler?'

'Certainly to find out all he could, on the spot, and be in a position to contact the trawler, or any other vessel they chose to send.'

'But how could they know that our chef would fall ill just then?' the Manager demanded.

'Did he have ulcers? If so, I expect they knew it; if not, they may have poisoned him. Have any other chefs in the Islands been taken ill recently?'

The Manager fairly gaped at him.

'Yes!—come to think of it the chef at the Horizon Hotel fell ill about the same time, and so did the cook at the Zennor. But are you implying'—he looked angry—'that our people here are poisoners?'

'No. I'm merely suggesting that Communist infiltration is extremely thorough. Are you sure that there are no Czech still-room maids at those two hotels you mentioned? They would serve the chef with his coffee, wouldn't they?'

The Manager actually turned pale.

'Good Lord! We've got one here!—and I fancy they had foreigners at the Zennor and the Horizon too. You know what it is with staff today; you take what you can get.'

'Naturally. But don't bother to discharge your Czech girl—having made your chef ill she's done her job; I don't suppose she'll poison anyone else!'

'And you mean, seriously, that these girls were sent to take jobs here to be on hand to poison chefs, so that a spy could be introduced?'

'Precisely that. And this man answered your advertisement—much the most useful situation in relation to Shipman Head—and came, and did his stuff.'

'Extraordinary that you should actually have seen him doing it,' the Manager said. He went through into the bar and fetched a second round of drinks.

'He cleared off the very next day,' he told Jamieson on his return, setting down the two glasses. 'Left us rather in the soup, of course; but our No. 2 chef isn't too bad.'

'Oh yes—I heard he'd gone. The St. Mary's police were rather cross with me for not having told them about him sooner, when they heard he'd skipped it, but they were going to try to have him picked up at Paddington. I wonder if that came off?' Philip had entirely forgotten to enquire about this when he was in London.

'No, it didn't,' the Manager said. 'The police were onto us about him more than once. He left on the *Scillonian* all right, but there was no certain record of his having boarded the London train.'

'I daresay not. Probably a car met him in some side street at Penzance and took him away. Oh well, he's out of it now, too. It's all over,' Philip said, suddenly rather sadly. Poor old Prof.—all was most definitely over for him, as it was for the Russian sailor. He thanked his host, and took Julia in to have lunch.

But the thought of the wretched little Russian, would-be murderer as he was, had given him an idea, and over their meal he put it to Julia.

'I should like there to be a very tiny tombstone for that Russian seaman who was done in by his mates,' he said. 'Do you suppose they would put up a tombstone to unknowns, cast up by the sea?'

'I shouldn't think so, usually—tombstones are frightfully expensive nowadays.' Julia had been going into the question of one for the Professor, and knew what she was talking about. 'But the Padre would know. Anyhow, why do you want him to have one? He tried to kill the Prof.'

'Agreed. But he had a soul; every Communist must *have* a soul—though their régime doesn't give them much chance to develop them. I sometimes think we each ought to pray for the soul of one Communist.'

She looked at him, wide-eyed.

'Do you pray, Philip? Funny that I've never asked you that before.'

'Oh yes, night and morning—plain Presbyterian prayers, that

